NATION

NTF meant to assess safety in hospitals must expedite work: SC

≫ Page: 4 ≪

BUSINESS

Sunil Mittal joins Ambani to pitch for satellite spectrum

≫ Page: 7 ≪

SPORTS

Rain may play spoilsport in India vs NZ 1st Test

≫ Page: 9 ≪

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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

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Israel assures US it won't strike Iran's nuclear or oil sites

WASHINGTON, 15 OCT

The Biden administration believes it has won assurances from Israel that it will not hit Iranian nuclear or oil sites as it looks to strike back following Iran's missile barrage earlier this month, two US officials said Tuesday. The administration also believes that sending a US Terminal High Altitude Area Defence battery to Israel and roughly 100 soldiers to operate it has eased some of Israel's concerns about possible Iranian retaliation and general security issues. Oil prices fell sharply Tuesday, extending recent losses after reports suggested that Israel will not attack Iranian oil facilities. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 6

Rape accused BJP MLA Muniratna gets bail

BENGALURU, 15 OCT

A special court here on Tuesday granted bail to BJP MLA Muniratna, who is in judicial custody, in a rape case. A case was registered after a woman lodged a complaint at Kaggalipur police station in Ramanagara, alleging that Muniratna, who represents the Rajarajeshwari Nagar constituency, raped her at various locations. Before these accusations surfaced, Muniratna had already been arrested in a separate case involving caste abuse and death threats made to a contractor. After securing bail in that case, the rape allegations emerged, leading to his re-arrest. *—PTI*

EAM arrives in Islamabad to attend SCO

ISLAMABAD, 15 OCT

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Tuesday landed in Islamabad to attend a conclave of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), in the first visit to Pakistan by a high-ranking Indian minister in nearly a decade that came amid frosty ties between the two neighbours. Jaishankar's aircraft landed at the Nur Khan airbase on the outskirts of the Pakistani capital city at around 3:30 pm and he was greeted by senior Pakistani officials. It is the first time in nearly nine years that India's foreign minister travelled to Pakistan even as the ties between the two neighbours remained tense over the Kashmir issue and cross-border terrorism emanating from Pakistan. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 6

Lankan President to visit India after parl polls

COLOMBO, 15 OCT

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's visit to Delhi at the invitation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi will happen only after November this year, Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath said on Tuesday. Voting for the parliamentary election is to take place on 14 November, almost 10 months ahead of the schedule. Dissanayake was elected on 21 September. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar became the first foreign dignitary to meet Dissanayake after the presidential polls. He extended the invitation to Dissanayake from the Indian prime minister. Earlier in February this year, Dissanayake visited Delhi, as a leader of opposition, for a formal visit. *—PTI*

Rains bring utter chaos in *namma* BENGALURU

PHOTOS: MOHAMMED ASAD

People seek shelter under umbrellas in front of Vidhana Soudha as rain swept through Bengaluru on Tuesday

BENGALURU, 15 OCT

Incessant rains since early on Tuesday threw normal life out of gear in central and southern parts of Karnataka, including the capital Bengaluru where several localities witnessed water-logging and traffic congestion.

Bengaluru Deputy Commissioner announced a holiday for all schools in Bengaluru on Wednesday due to rains. However, colleges will remain open.

Due to continuous rains in Bengaluru, the Meteorological Department has issued an orange alert for the next two days. As a precautionary measure in the interest of students, all taluk Anganwadi centres, private/aided primary and high schools of Bengaluru City will be closed on Wednesday, a government order stated.

According to IMD, Bengaluru Urban recorded 12.2 mm of rainfall on Tuesday. Bengaluru International Airport and HAL airport observatories recorded 10.5 mm and 8.6 mm of rainfall.

Waterlogging at Hennur Main Road

Meanwhile, IMD has issued a yellow alert for Tumakuru, Mysuru, Kodagu, Chikkamagaluru, Hassan, Kolar, Shivamogga and Chikkaballapura in addition to coastal Karnataka.

"This situation will prevail for the next three to four days," IMD said.

Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike set up 24X7 exclusive control rooms in its eight zones and also launched a helpline number (1533). Karnataka Innovation and Technology Society recommended that all private IT and BT firm permit their employees to work from home to beat rainwater logging and traffic congestion. Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda said that 60 National Disaster Response Force and State Disaster Response Force personnel have been deployed in the City. —PTI

>>>More on Pages 2

RESULTS ON 23 NOV

M'rashtra polls on 20 Nov, J'khand on 13 & 20 Nov

CEC Rajiv Kumar with Election Commissioners Gyanesh Kumar and Sukhbir Singh Sandhu in New Delhi on Tuesday *PHOTO: PTI*

NEW DELHI, 15 OCT

The Assembly polls in Maharashtra will be held in a single phase on 20 November, while Jharkhand polls will be held in two phases on 13 and 20 November, Election Commission of India announced on Tuesday.

The votes for the two states will be counted on 23 November. "There are 9.63 crore eligible voters in Maharashtra, while the number of eligible voters in Jharkhand is 2.6 crore," it said. Bypolls will also be held in 48 assembly seats and two Lok Sabha seats. BJP is keen to retain power in Maharashtra along with allies Shiv Sena and the NCP. In Jharkhand, Congress is playing second fiddle to the JMM led by Chief Minister Hemant Soren, while the BJP is looking to make a comeback. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

Bypolls to 3 K'taka Assembly seats on 13 Nov

NEW DELHI, 15 OCT

Election Commission on Tuesday announced the bypolls in Karnataka's Channapatna, Sandur, and Shiggaon on 13 November and the results will be declared on 23 November.

The last date for filing nominations is 25 October, and the final date for withdrawal of nominations is 30 October.

The seats Sandur, Shiggaon, and Channapatna were represented by E Tukaram from Congress, Basavaraj Bommai from BJP and HD Kumaraswamy from JD(S). *—PTI*

ALLIANCE MATHS

MAHARASHTRA | TOTAL SEATS: 288

MAHAYUTI (RULING GOVT)		MAHA VIKAS AGHAD (MVA)	
BJP	102 seats	Congress	37 seats
Shiv Sena led by Eknath Shinde	38 seats	Shiv Sena	16 seats
NCP led by Ajit Pawar	40 seats	NCP	12 seats
		SP	2 seats
		CPI(M)	1 seats

JHARKHAND | TOTAL SEATS: 81

INDIA BLOC (RULING GOVT)		OPPN
JMM	30 seats	BJP
Cong	16 seats	25 seats
RJD	1 seats	

Freebies plea: SC notice to govt

Supreme Court has sought response from the Centre and EC on a fresh plea against political parties promising freebies during elections. The bench issued notices to the Union of India and the poll panel on a petition filed by Bengaluru resident Shashank J Sreedhara.

—PTI

Canada claims Bishnoi linked to Indian envoys

NEW DELHI, 15 OCT

The India-Canada diplomatic row over the killing of Sikh separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar escalated further on Tuesday with Ottawa attempting to link the Bishnoi gang with Indian government agents to carry out covert operations in that country and New Delhi stoutly trashing the charges.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police alleged that Indian agents are using criminals to "target" the South Asian community, specifically pro-Khalistani elements in Canada.

The Indian government sources said the assertions by Canadian officials that Canada presented

As the ties between the two countries hit rock bottom, Canadian Foreign Minister Melanie Joly did not rule out imposing sanctions against India saying "everything is on the table".

On its part, India strongly rejected attempts by Canadian authorities to link Indian agents with criminal gangs in Canada with official sources even saying that Ottawa's assertion that it shared evidence with New Delhi in the Nijjar case was simply not true.The sources also rejected Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's allegations that India was engaging in activities including carrying out covert operations targeting Canadian nationals in his country. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer agreed on the "importance of the rule of law" during a phone call with his Canadian counterpart Justin Trudeau. While the statement does not make a direct reference to India, it refers to "allegations" under investigation in Canada.

On Monday, India expelled six Canadian diplomats and announced withdrawing its high commissioner from Canada after dismissing Ottawa's allegations linking the envoy to a probe into the killing of Sikh extremist Nijjar. *—PTI*

>>>More on Pages 3 & 5

INDIA BUYS 31 DRONES FROM US FOR ₹32,000 CR

NEW DELHI, 15 OCT

India on Tuesday inked a mega deal with the US to procure 31 Predator long-endurance drones from American defence major General Atomics under the foreign military sales route at a cost of nearly Rs 32,000 crore to boost Indian military's combat prowess along the contested borders with China.

According to reports, the total value of the deal could rise to Rs 34,500 crore.

The procurement of the drones was finalised just weeks ahead of the US presidential elections.

The deal follows talks that began in 2018. It is expected to significantly increase India's surveillance and intelligence capabilities and is in line with US efforts to coax India away from buying Russian military equipment and counter China's growing dominance.

While the Navy will get 15 Sea Guardian drones, the Indian Air Force and the Army will each get eight Sky Guardian drones. *—PTI*

NEW CHINESE SETTLEMENT UNDER CONSTRUCTION NEAR PANGONG LAKE

New satellite images show the construction of a large Chinese settlement on the northern banks of the Pangong Tso – a strategically located saltwater lake that separates China and India. The images captured by US-based Maxar Technologies on 9 October showed at least 70 permanent structures and smaller hutments spread over a large area around 38 km east of the LAC territory. The structure on the Chinese territory can accommodate 6-8 soldiers or up to 10 tonnes of weapons. It is 15km east of a new bridge that China has constructed across the high-altitude Pangong Lake

PANEL MUST EXAMINE

Disability no bar for MBBS admission: SC

NEW DELHI, 15 OCT

Supreme Court on Tuesday said mere existence of a benchmark disability of 40 per cent does not bar a person from pursuing medical education unless there is an expert report that the candidate was incapacitated from pursuing MBBS.

A bench of Justices B R Gavai, Aravind Kumar and K V Viswanathan also held that if the Disability Assessment Boards conclude the candidate won't be able to pursue the course, it should state why.

The top court gave its detailed reasoning in the case of Omkar Ramchandra Gond, an aspiring medical student from Maharashtra who qualified the NEET (UG)-24.

Gond was held as ineligible from pursuing an MBBS course as he suffered 45 percent speech and language permanent disability under the Graduate Medical Education Regulations of 1997. The top court had on 18 September granted admission to Gond after seeking an opinion from a medical board. Justice Viswanathan, who penned the verdict on behalf of the bench, said that it is the constitutional goal that within the limits of its economic capacity and development, the State was to make effective provisions for securing the right to education including for the persons with disabilities. The bench added that pending formulation of appropriate regulations by the National Medical Commission (NMC), pursuant to the communication of January 25, 2024 by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, the DABs will keep in mind the salutary points while forming their opinion. *—PTI*

Meitei, Kuki MLAs from Manipur meet in Delhi

NEW DELHI, 15 OCT

Around 20 MLAs belonging to the warring Meitei and Kuki communities of Manipur met here on Tuesday for the first time since ethnic violence broke out 17 months ago, in a bid to hammer out a peaceful solution to the ongoing conflict.

BJP MP Sambit Patra and three Naga MLAs were also present at the over-two-hour-long meeting convened by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).

However, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh did not attend the meeting.

This was the first time since 3 May, 2023 that the Meitei and Kuki MLAs were in a same room. None of the 10 Kuki MLAs set foot in the Meitei-dominated Imphal valley and state capital Imphal in the last year and a half. They have also given all the Assembly sessions held since then a miss. Sources said both sides put forward the views and grievances of the two communities and their sufferings during the long turmoil. According to the wishes of the Kukis, the MLAs earlier pressed their demand for a separate administration or a Union Territory. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Deepavali spl train to run between B'luru, Kalaburagi

BENGALURU, 15 OCT

The South Western Railway (SWR) has decided to run special trains between Bengaluru and Kalaburagi stations to accommodate the extra rush of passengers during the Deepavali festival. The SWR said the Bengaluru-Kalaburagi Express Special will leave Sir M Visvesvaraya Terminal (SMVT) in Bengaluru at 9.15 pm on 30 October and 2 November, 2024 and reach Kalaburagi at 7.40 am the next day via Yelahanka, Dharmavaram, Anantapur, Guntakal, Adoni, Manthralayam Road, Raichur, Krishna, Yadgir and Shahabad stations. In the return direction, Kalaburagi-SMVT Bengaluru Express Special will leave Kalaburagi at 9.35 am on 31 October and 3 November and reach SMVT Bengaluru at 8 pm on the same day via following the same route. The train will consist of 19 coaches, including 12 General Second Class coaches, 3 Sleeper Class coaches, 2 AC Three-tier coaches, one Luggage/ Brake Van cum generator car and one second class luggage, brake van with disabled coach. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

'K'taka aims to become gaming capital of Asia'

NEW DELHI, 15 OCT

During a special address at the second edition of the Indian Gaming Convention (IGC), Shri Priyank Kharge, Minister of Information Technology and Biotechnology, Government of Karnataka, said, "Karnataka has all that is needed to ensure that we become the gaming and the animation capital of not only this country but also of Asia. The two-day convention is being organised by the Internet and Mobile Association of India, on October 14-15, at the Taj Palace, New Delhi. "Bengaluru and Karnataka are the fourth largest technology clusters in the world. We run over 27 centres of excellence. We are setting up a centre of excellence specifically for gaming and I also am extremely keen to host India's first government-sponsored eSports Olympics to ensure that we remain the leaders in this sector and be the most disruptive innovation capital in the world," he said —*ANI*

PHOTO: X

Former MLC Ismail Kalebudde laid to rest

HUBBALLI, 15 OCT

Ismail Kalebudde, former MLC and former president of Anjuman-e-Islam who played a key role in facilitating a truce on the hoisting national flag at Idgah Maidan in Hubballi, died on Monday night. He was 88. People of all walks of life paid their last respects to the departed leader at his residence on Tuesday where his mortal remains were kept before the funeral. Kalebudde, who was a member of Janata Parivar, was said to be a close aide of Janata Dal(S) supremo and former prime minister HD Deve Gowda. He was an MLC between 1998 and 2004, and was also a recipient of Rajyotsava Award. —*Agencies*

Valmiki funds misused to bribe Ballari voters with ₹200 each: ED

Nagendra allegedly utilised these govt funds to 'cover' his personal expenses

NEW DELHI/BENGALURU, 15 OCT

Over seven lakh people in Ballari Lok Sabha seat were given Rs 200 each to vote in favour of Congress candidate during General Elections this year and this money came from the cash siphoned in the alleged Valmiki scam by former tribal minister B Nagendra along with his aides, the ED has claimed in its charge sheet.

It also charged that the legislator utilised these government funds to "cover" his personal expenses, like booking flights for himself and his associates, payment of electricity bills, vehicle maintenance and paying the monthly salaries of household staff.

Nagendra, 53, was granted bail by a special court for people's representatives in Bengaluru on Monday.

The federal agency had filed its first charge sheet in this case last month before a Special Prevention of Money Laundering Act court in Bengaluru listing Nagendra as the accused no 1, apart from 24 others which included his aides, linked people and some companies.

Nagendra told ED that JG Padmanabha, Managing Director of Valmiki Corporation under his ministry, "fraudulently" transferred funds of the corporation without his knowledge or approval from the board. He denied any wrongdoing saying he did not benefit personally from the siphoned funds. In his statements, Padmanabha told the ED that he was acting on the orders of the higher officials, including

B Nagendra PHOTO: X

Nagendra, and he had no real control over the fraudulent activities.

About the role of Nagedra's personal assistants -- B Vijay Kumar Gowda and Nekkenti Nagaraj-- and his associate Rudrayya, ED claimed that they "admitted" to handling large sums of money, which aligns with the broader scheme of siphoning funds for electoral purposes.

The agency said Gowda gave the agency a statement describing how cash was distributed in the Ballari LS seat during the 2024 Lok Sabha elections in which E Tukaram was Congress candidate.

It further alleged that Nagendra, in coordination with Ballari LS seat MLAs like Nara Bharath Reddy (Bellary city), MLA Ganesh (Kampli) and Kudligi MLA Dr N T Srinivas distributed cash funds as per the assigned polling stations among them.

The agency drew up a tabular column in the prosecution complaint (chargesheet) to show that 7,40,112 voters in Ballari were given Rs 200 each from the Valmiki funds totalling more than Rs 14 crore apart from Rs 10,000 each to party workers in each booth totalling over Rs 72 lakh. - —*PTI*

No shortage of funds for Valmiki Corporation: CM

BENGALURU, 15 OCT

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Tuesday said Karnataka Maharshi Valmiki Scheduled Tribes Development Corporation, where misappropriation of funds was reported earlier this year, will face no shortage of funds.

"The misappropriation of funds in the Valmiki Corporation should not be a reason for any shortage of funds for the tribal development," Siddaramaiah said after a meeting on tribal development. The government will sanction the funds to the Corporation as announced in the Budget in February this year, he said.

Siddaramaiah said there was misappropriation of funds to the tune Rs 89.63 crore, out of which Rs 71.54 crore has been recovered. - —*PTI*

PHOTOS: MOHAMMED ASAD

Vehicles bunch up on Ballari Road near Cauvery junction after heavy rain in Bengaluru, Karnataka on Tuesday

Heavy showers lead to traffic snarls in IT hub

BENGALURU, 15 OCT

The traffic snarls were reported in Bengaluru on a Tuesday after a massive rain lashed across the City.

Motorists faced difficulties navigating through the City traffic due to the downpour as several roads in Varthur, Hebbal, Kadubeesanahalli, and surrounding areas were water-logged.

Areas housing major technology companies like Manyata Tech Park on Outer Ring Road (ORR) and tech hubs like Sarjapur were among the affected. The junction opposite RGA Tech Park on Sarjapur Road, beneath the Carmelaram Railway overbridge, also remains flooded. Similarly, severe waterlogging was reported near the Wipro Gate on Sarjapur Road.

"Nagawara flyover near Manyata Tech Park is waterlogged....Slow movement of vehicles on both sides," a traffic official said. "Hennur-Bagalur road, Ganganagar, and Ramamurthy Nagar were also waterlogged. Heavy rainfall has led to slow-moving traffic across the city."

According to Traffic Police, gridlocks were reported on major roads including ORR, Tumakuru Road and Airport Road. Heavy waterlogging was also reported on Bellary Road at Hunsamaranahalli. "Traffic towards airport is severely affected. Commuters are requested to plan their travel accordingly and use alternate routes," a traffic police official urged.

"There is heavy waterlogging and congestion on ORR between Kadubeesanahalli and Marathalli. Traffic movement is slow," he said. India Meteorological Department officials said a low-pressure area that formed over the Bay of Bengal was the trigger for the widespread rainfall.

They said the arid regions of northern parts of the state would witness similar weather conditions in the next 24 hours. "This situation will prevail for the next three to four days," an official said.

Students and office-goers in Bengaluru in particular had a tough time following road congestion due to the rains. —*PTI*

Clockwise from top: Vehicles ply on waterlogged roads in Manyata Tech Park in Bengaluru, on Tuesday; A man rides a scooter while holding an umbrella; Commuters wait to board a public transport bus

All to get Cauvery drinking water: CM

BENGALURU, 15 OCT

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said a project to provide Cauvery drinking water to every household in Bengaluru would be inaugurated on Wednesday.

With operationalisation of the Cauvery Phase-5 project, drinking water will be made available to 50 lakh beneficiaries of 110 villages coming under city civic body Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP), he said on Tuesday.

According to officials, 1,500 Million Litres per Day (MLD) of water are being provided to the city through the previous four phases of the project. Under the fifth one, 775 MLD will be provided to several key areas, including Yeshwantpur, T Dasarahalli, Mahadevpura, Bengaluru South, Bommanahalli, and Rajarajeshwari Nagar.

"The countdown to the fulfillment of our commitment to provide Cauvery water to every house in Bengaluru City has started. This project costing Rs 4,336 crores is sure to provide comfort to the lives of Bengaloreans," the Chief Minister said in an online post.

PHOTO: PIXABAY

The project will be inaugurated by the Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar at Thorekadanahalli in Mandya district.

Presenting the 2024-25 budget in February this year, the Chief Minister had also said that under the Cauvery Phase-5 project, underground drainage works would be completed by December 2024.

As part of the project, 228 km of drainage pipeline would be laid and 13 Sewage Treatment Plants with a capacity to treat 100 MLD of sewage water constructed, he had said. —*PTI*

READY TO FACE ASSEMBLY BYPOLLS: CM

BENGALURU, 15 OCT

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Tuesday said the ruling Congress is ready to face the bypolls in Channapatna, Shiggaon and Sandur Assembly constituencies.

The Election Commission announced that the bypolls would be held in the three segments on 13 November. "We are ready to face the by-elections and have made all the preparations. We will contest it," Siddaramaiah told reporters here. The by-polls in Channapatna, Shiggaon, and Sandur were due after HD Kumaraswamy (JD(S)), Basavaraj Bommai (BJP) and E Tukaram (Congress) resigned following their victory in the Lok Sabha elections in May this year. —*PTI*

BJP leaders to meet Murmu, seek dismissal of Siddaramaiah govt

MANGALURU, 15 OCT

Karnataka BJP President BY Vijayendra on Tuesday said his party leaders would soon meet President Droupadi Murmu and request her to dismiss the "corrupt and anti-Hindu" Siddaramaiah-led government in the State.

He also said his party would stage a 'massive protest' in Hubballi on 25 October against Congress government's decision to withdraw cases against the rioters who vandalised police vehicles and injured many policemen in the north Karnataka town two years ago.

BY Vijayendra PHOTO: PTI

"We will meet the President in the coming days and request her to dismiss this anti-Hindu and corrupt government and the Chief Minister," Vijayendra told reporters. In this context, he referred to the Karnataka Maharshi Valmiki Scheduled Tribes Development Corporation and Mysuru Urban Development Authority 'scams'.

He alleged that while the State government has decided to withdraw cases against "the anti-social elements" who were involved in the 'Hubballi episode', it is not willing to drop cases against the "Hindu workers." The government on 10 October decided to withdraw criminal cases registered against a mob which had attacked policemen with stones on 16 April, 2022 in Hubballi. —*PTI*

'NO EXPLANATION NEEDED'

HC upholds BDA's right to reject auction bids

BENGALURU, 15 OCT

Karnataka High Court has upheld Bangalore Development Authority's (BDA) power to accept or reject bids in site auctions without providing reasons.

A division bench consisting of Justice Anu Sivaraman and Justice G Basavaraja concluded that the BDA's decision was lawful, aligning with the public interest and benefiting the general public.

The case arose after BDA challenged a single-judge bench decision that quashed its rejection of a bid by a person named Sachin Nagarajappa. The single judge had directed BDA to confirm Nagarajappa's bid of Rs 1,54,000 per square metre, prompting the authority to appeal.

BDA argued that its actions were consistent with BDA (Disposal of Corner Sites and Commercial Sites) Rules, 1984, which empower the authority to accept or reject bids without offering explanations. BDA emphasised that public property auctions aim to secure the highest possible price, and it retains the right to cancel bids if the offered price is deemed inadequate.

PHOTO: HTTPS://ENG.BDABANGALORE.ORG

The division bench referred to Rule 7 and the General Terms and Conditions of the BDA's e-Auction Notification, noting that the rule allows the authority to reject bids without providing reasons.

- Division bench consisting of Justice Anu Sivaraman and Justice G Basavaraja concluded that the BDA's decision was lawful, aligning with the public interest and benefiting the general public

The court emphasised that the judiciary cannot interfere with the policy decisions made by the legislature or regulatory bodies unless there is evidence of illegality or misconduct. Since the respondent did not challenge the constitutionality of Rule 7, and no evidence of fraud, collusion, or favoritism was presented, the court observed and concluded that the BDA's decision was neither arbitrary nor irrational. It further noted that the property had been sold for over Rs 10 crore in a subsequent auction, benefiting BDA. —*PTI*

Bank manager, 3 sales staff held in ₹97cr stock market fraud

BENGALURU, 15 OCT

PHOTO: PIXABAY

City police have arrested eight people, including a manager and three sales executives of Axis Bank, in connection with an alleged Rs 97-crore fraud, promising high returns through stock investments.

As many as 254 cases linked to the scam have been registered across the country and the bank staff carried out the fraud through six bank accounts. The arrested include Kishore Sahu, a bank manager with the bank's Nagarabhavi branch, and sales executives Manohar, Karthik and Rakesh. Lakshmikanta, Raghuraj, Kengegowda and Mala CP, who held mule accounts, were taken into custody, police said.

An Axis Bank spokesperson in a statement said: "The matter is currently under investigation and Axis Bank is fully cooperating with the investigating authorities to expedite the process."

The scam came to light after a man from Yelahanka filed a complaint in March. The man was added to a WhatsApp group that allegedly provided stock trading tips, promising returns 10 times the investment, police said. The man invested Rs 1.5 crore in total and received WhatsApp messages confirming big gains.

The scammers sent doctored screenshots showing that the trading account had grown to Rs 28 crore. The victim got suspicious when they demanded a "server management fee" of Rs 75 lakh to withdraw the funds and he complained to police. —*Agencies*

7 MLCs sworn in ahead of Maharashtra polls

MUMBAI, 15 OCT

Hours before the announcement of the Maharashtra assembly elections, seven members of the state legislative council, appointed by the governor, were administered the oath of secrecy on Tuesday. Of the seven new MLCs, the BJP has nominated three, while Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena and Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar's NCP have two members each. The governor can appoint 12 candidates as MLCs with a tenure of six years, and they are appointed from different walks of life. The NCP chose Pankaj Bhujbal, the son of state cabinet minister Chhagan Bhujbal, and former mayor Sangli, Miraj Kupwad municipal corporation Idris Naikwadi. Earlier in the day, the state government informed the Bombay High Court that there was no impediment in the appointment of seven MLCs. The total capacity of the Maharashtra legislative council is 78. *—PTI*

CM Stalin to skip Omar's swearing-in, Kanimozhi to attend

CHENNAI, 15 OCT

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin will not be attending the swearing-in of Omar Abdullah as chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir owing to the IMD issuing a 'red alert' due to the northeast monsoon, the state government said on Tuesday. DMK MP Kanimozhi will represent the party at the swearing-in ceremony on 16 October. Jammu and Kashmir National Conference president Farooq Abdullah called up the Tamil Nadu chief minister and invited him for the swearing-in of his son and JKNC vice president Omar Abdullah as chief minister, an official release here said. But Stalin conveyed his inability to attend in person as the IMD had forecast a 'red alert' due to the northeast monsoon in the state, and that he was engaged in precautionary work, the release said. *—PTI*

BJP names Jay Panda in-charge for Delhi polls

NEW DELHI, 15 OCT

BJP on Tuesday appointed Baijayant Jay Panda, one of its vice-presidents, as the party's in-charge for the Assembly polls in Delhi. Ghaziabad MP Atul Garg will be the co-incharge. Panda, a Lok Sabha MP from Odisha, had earlier held organisational responsibilities for Delhi. His appointment as the poll in-charge will help BJP draw from his understanding of the party's dynamics in the national capital. Delhi Assembly polls are expected to be held early next year. The polls hold much more symbolic significance that the Union Territory's political weight. BJP has not been in power in the capital since 1998 and is making strong efforts to inflict a political defeat on Aam Aadmi Party leader and former chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, a fierce critic of the saffron party under whom the AAP has become a national party. *—PTI*

EC turns down NCP(SP)'s trumpet symbol demand

PANAJI, 15 OCT

Election Commission on Tuesday said it had agreed to a request by NCP (Sharad Pawar) for prominent display of it poll symbol -- man blowing 'turha' -- on ballot units of EVMs, but turned down the demand to freeze the trumpet symbol. Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar said the NCP-SP had conveyed to the poll authority that its election symbol -- 'man blowing turha' -- was not displayed prominently on the ballot units of EVMs. "We had asked them to specify how would they want their poll symbol to be displayed on the ballot unit. The NCP-SP had given us three options on the poll symbol and we accepted the first suggestion made by them," Kumar said. *—PTI*

It's NDA's confidence vs INDIA's comeback struggle

Mahayuti wants a comeback; Congress allies with JMM

NEW DELHI, 15 OCT

If BJP's win against odds in Haryana polls helped it blunt the impression of an ascendent Congress, the ruling party will look to decisively turn the tables on INDIA bloc in the elections in Maharashtra and Jharkhand where regional satraps are being seen as lynchpins to Opposition's campaign.

An impressive performance in Jharkhand and, especially, Maharashtra assembly polls next month by BJP-led National Democratic Alliance will lay to rest the doubts over the party's political dominance after its underwhelming performance in Lok Sabha polls and strike a body blow to Opposition.

Congress said it will contest the Jharkhand assembly elections in alliance with the JMM, with a final decision on seat sharing expected soon.

However, it raised concerns on how Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma knew that the election dates would be announced on Tuesday.

EC announced dates for Assembly polls on Tuesday ***PHOTO: PTI***

BJP also mentioned that the seat-sharing arrangement among NDA partners for the assembly elections was "almost final," with the first list of candidates to be announced within 48 hours of the polls being declared.

Congress also claimed that Mahayuti government in Maharashtra knows it is not coming back to power and has spent its last few days allegedly bestowing "gifts" on the Adani group at the expense of the people of Mumbai.

Ahead of Jharkhand assembly elections, Congress leader Manju Kumari joined BJP.

Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati said that her party will contest on its own in Maharashtra, Jharkhand as well as byelections in Uttar Pradesh.

Opposition in Maharashtra said the 35-day period during which the assembly elections process will take place is shorter than usual while the poll body gave enough time to the government to announce a slew of schemes. *—PTI*

Congress appoints observers for M'rashtra, J'khand

Congress on Tuesday appointed division-wise AICC senior observers for the Maharashtra Assembly polls with Ashok Gehlot and G Parameshwara to look after the Mumbai and Konkan region and Sachin Pilot and Uttam Kumar Reddy to oversee the Marathwada region. The opposition party also appointed three AICC senior observers for Jharkhand assembly elections, Tariq Anwar, Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury and Bhatti Vikramarka Mallu. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge has appointed Mukul Wasnik and Avinash Pande as Maharashtra state election senior coordinators. While Gehlot and Parameshwara have been appointed senior observers for Mumbai and Konkan. Meanwhile, Congress has expelled MLA Hiraman Khoskar from the party for six years for indulging in "anti-party activities" after joining NCP.

J'KHAND CM SOREN WRITES TO PM ON R1.36L CR COAL DUES

RANCHI, 15 OCT

Hours before Election Commission is set to announce the schedule for Jharkhand and Maharashtra assembly polls on Tuesday, Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi demanding clearance of Rs 1.36 lakh-crore in pending dues from coal companies.

Soren emphasised that he is not asking for a "special budget" for the state but is requesting its rightful dues, which he claims are causing irreparable harm to Jharkhand's development.

"This outstanding amount is our right... Jharkhand is not asking for a special budget. We are just asking for our rights—which we will take under all circumstances," Soren posted on X, sharing the open letter to PM.

"The people of Jharkhand have fought a long struggle for their state, and now we want proper use of our resources and rights. We will use our outstanding amount of Rs 1.36 lakh-crore to take Jharkhand on a new path of development - a development that protects the interests of our environment, tribals and every Jharkhandi community," he said. *—PTI*

Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar speaks during a press conference, in New Delhi, on Tuesday ***PHOTO: PTI***

Need to check exit polls: CEC to media

NEW DELHI, 15 OCT

Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar on Tuesday slammed the practice of showing early trends on counting day by news channels as "nonsense".

Addressing a press conference here, Kumar also said exit polls create a huge distraction by raising expectations and it was a matter for self-introspection for the media, particularly electronic media.

"We do not govern exit polls, but there is a need for self-introspection. What was the sample size, where was the survey done, how did the result come and what is my responsibility if I did not match to that result, are there disclosures – all of these need to be seen," Kumar said, flanked by two Election Commissioners Gyanesh Kumar and SS Sandhu.

CEC said associations such as the News Broadcasting and Digital Standards Authority should do some self-regulation.

"Counting happens roughly on the third day after the elections end. Expectations rise from 6 pm, but there is no scientific basis to this in public disclosure," he said.

The CEC said the Election Commission starts putting out trends or results on its website from 9:30 am onwards at two-hour intervals. Congress had questioned the delay in displaying results on the Election Commission website in the recently concluded Haryana assembly polls.

Days after NCP leader Baba Siddique was killed in Mumbai, Kumar also said EC will take a strict view on preventing violence, especially against political personalities, as the Model Code of Conduct comes into force in Maharashtra. *—PTI*

INDIA-CANADA ROW

Trudeau accuses India of using diplomats to attack Canadians

OTTAWA, 15 OCT

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has accused India of choosing to use its diplomats and organised crime to attack its citizens and make them feel unsafe on their soil, calling it a "monumental mistake" by New Delhi.

The ties between India and Canada came under severe strain following Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau's allegations in September last year of a "potential" involvement of Indian agents in the killing of Nijjar. New Delhi rejected Trudeau's charges as "absurd".

In his comments at the media briefing on Monday, Trudeau, referring to findings by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), claimed that it has "clear and compelling evidence that agents of the government of India have engaged in, and continue to engage in,

PHOTO: PTI

activities that pose a significant threat to public safety".

He said his government's attempts to work with India did not yield any result.

"That is why, this weekend, Canadian officials took an extraordinary step. They met with Indian officials to share RCMP evidence, which concluded six agents of the Government of India are persons of interest in criminal activities," he said.

Meanwhile, sources said the escalation in the diplomatic row between India and Canada will not have an impact on the bilateral trade and investment

> **The Government of India is duty-bound to protect the national interest for which it has the support across political parties in India. The government should take the Opposition parties into confidence over the row with Canada**
>
> - CPI(M)

ties between the two countries.

They also said that the bilateral trade value is not significant and Canadian funds can route their investments through Singapore, the UAE and the US.

Canada is India's one of the primary sources of lentils and now that can come from Australia, they said, adding that Indian students and professionals would also have huge opportunities in different countries. *—PTI*

Baba's murder: 4th accused sent to custody till 21 Oct

MUMBAI, 15 OCT

A court here on Tuesday remanded the fourth accused arrested in connection with the murder of NCP leader and former Maharashtra minister Baba Siddique in police custody till October 21.

The accused, Harishkumar Nisad, 23, was apprehended from Bahraich, Uttar Pradesh, earlier in the day.

Police informed the court that Nisad, who is a scrap dealer in Pune, was also part of the conspiracy to kill Siddique and had provided financial help for the operation.

The police said they needed to find details of the financial transactions and who sponsored them.

Police had earlier arrested Haryana resident Gurmail Baljit Singh, 23, Uttar Pradesh native Dharmaraj Rajesh Kashyap, 19, both alleged shooters, and "co-conspirator" Pravin Lonkar from Pune. They have been remanded in police custody till 21 October.

A court on Tuesday remanded the fourth accused arrested in connection with the murder of NCP's Baba Siddique ***PHOTO: PTI***

Another suspected shooter, Shivkumar Gautam, who also hails from Bahraich, is still on the run. The Mumbai crime branch has formed various teams to nab Shivkumar Gautam, accused Mohammed Zeeshan Akhtar and other persons wanted in the case.

The crime branch was also probing various angles, including a possible contract killing, business or political rivalry or threat over a slum rehabilitation project, according to officials. *—PTI*

KERALA TABLES ADGP'S PROBE REPORTS

T'PURAM, 15 OCT

Two investigation reports, submitted by state police chief Sheikh Darvesh Saheb into the allegations against ADGP M R Ajithkumar, tabled in Kerala Assembly on Tuesday.

Reacting to the submission of the reports, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan in the House, said the spread of several unsubstantiated news and speculations regarding the probe reports related to ADGP had come to his notice.

A high-level investigation team, formed by the DGP, had probed various allegations that cropped up against the ADGP and also about his meetings with RSS leaders. Both these reports had been submitted to the government by the DGP on 5 October.

The tabling of the probe reports against the top IPS officer, considered to be a close confidant of CM Vijayan, came days after CUDF challenged the ruling dispensation. *—PTI*

EC announces bypolls to 2 LS & 48 assembly seats

NEW DELHI, 15 OCT

Election Commission on Tuesday announced bypolls to the Wayanad and Nanded Lok Sabha seats as well as 48 assembly constituencies.

Bypoll to the Basirhat Lok Sabha seat in West Bengal and the Milkipur assembly seat in Uttar Pradesh were not announced as election petitions are pending in the respective high courts against the candidates who had won

PHOTO: PTI

the seats earlier.

Bypoll to the Wayanad parliamentary seat and 47 assembly seats will be held on 13 November along with phase one elections for the Jharkhand Assembly. Priyanka Gandhi Vadra will contest from Wayanad.

Bypoll to the Nanded Lok Sabha seat and the Kedarnath assembly constituency will be held on 20 November along with Maharashtra polls.

Wayanad Lok Sabha seat was vacated by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi as he opted to keep Rae Bareli seat.

The Nanded Lok Sabha seat fell vacant after MP Vasant Chavan died recently. Similarly, TMC MP from the Basirhat Lok Sabha seat Haji Sheikh Nurul Islam passed away a few days ago.

48 assembly constituencies and two Lok Sabha seats where bypolls are being held are spread across 15 states - Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, , Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, , Punjab, etc. *—PTI*

'NO COMPROMISE ON SECURITY'

PM bats for global digital rules, ethical AI

NEW DELHI, 15 OCT

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday made a fervent pitch for putting in place a global framework for use of digital technology and ethical use of artificial intelligence (AI), saying security cannot be an afterthought in an interconnected world.

Speaking at the inauguration of the International Telecommunication Union - WTSA and India Mobile Congress here, he favoured clear 'dos' and 'don'ts' to safeguard citizens.

Digital rules are important not just because they involve personal privacy, media disinformation, the accountability of tech giants and other issues of societal importance, but

- Speaking at inauguration of International Telecommunication Union - WTSA and India Mobile Congress here, he favoured clear 'dos' and 'don'ts' to safeguard citizens

PM Narendra Modi ***PHOTO: PTI***

also because trade in goods and services rely on international flows of data.

Stating that digital tools and applications are beyond any physical boundaries and no country alone can safeguard its citizens from cyber threat, the Prime Minister said, "dos and don'ts have to be framed at the global level".

Stressing the need of creating a 'Do's' and 'Don'ts' for technology on the global level, the Prime Minister highlighted the borderless nature of digital tools and applications and urged for international collaboration in combating cyber threats and collective action by global institutions.

He inaugurated the International Tele communication Union - World Telecommunication Standardization Assembly (WTSA) 2024 at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi. Modi asked sectoral bodies like WTSA to proactively take up the issue.

Talking of India's experience, he said after the expeditious roll out, 5G telecom services are now available in most places across the country and work on 6G has already begun.

Giving out statistics, the Prime Minister said India has in the last decade become an exporter of mobile phones from being an importer, and has laid an optic fibre network that is eight-time more than the distance between earth and the moon. *—PTI*

On day 2, Oppn MPs walk out of Waqf Bill meeting

NEW DELHI, 15 OCT

Several Opposition MPs on Tuesday walked out of a meeting of the joint committee on the Waqf Bill, alleging derogatory remarks against them by a BJP member.

Opposition members, including Kalyan Banerjee, Gaurav Gogoi, A Raja, Mohamed Abdulla and Arvind Sawant, stormed out of the meeting of the parliamentary panel, which was hearing a presentation from representatives of the Ministry of Minority Affairs on the bill.

However, BJP members claimed that the Opposition members were abusing the chairman of the committee Jagadambika Pal.

This is the second consecutive day when Opposition members have walked out of meeting following differences.

Meanwhile, they wrote a letter to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on the "gross violation of parliamentary code of conduct" in the meeting of the joint committee examining the Waqf (Amendment) Bill by panel chairman Jagdambika Pal.

The letter came a day after several Opposition MPs boycotted a sitting of the committee over the submission of former Karnataka State Minorities Commission chairman Anwar Manippady, who named several Opposition leaders, including Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and K Rahman Khan, in the alleged embezzlement. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Sivamani takes over as new DG of Indian Coast Guard

NEW DELHI, 15 OCT

Paramesh Sivamani, who specialises in navigation and direction, has taken over as the 26th director general of the Indian Coast Guard. The Flag Officer, during his illustrious career spanning over three and a half decades, has served in various capacities in ashore and afloat appointments. Sivamani's sea commands include all major vessels of the Indian Coast Guard which include Advanced Offshore Patrol Vessel 'Samar' and Offshore Patrol Vessel 'Vishwast', the defence ministry said in a statement. He was given the additional charge of Director General Coast Guard in August 2024, it said. *—PTI*

Odisha: Elephant calf killed after being hit by train

BHUBANESWAR, 15 OCT

An elephant calf was killed and two other jumbos were injured after being hit by a goods train in Odisha's Sundargarh district, forest officials said. The incident took place around 9.30 pm on Monday on the Howrah-Mumbai line near Bondamunda in Bisra range of the Rourkela Forest Division. A herd of 23 elephants came on the tracks after being chased by local people, the officials said. While a calf was crushed under the wheels of the train, two other elephants also sustained injuries, they said. The herd was coming from Kudurbahal forest and was heading towards Pokharabahal. Forest officials and local police reached the spot and began an investigation into the incident. Meanwhile, trains passing through the area have been asked to run at slower speeds due to the presence of the elephants in the region. *—PTI*

UP man dies while dancing during idol immersion

BALLIA, 15 OCT

A 20-year-old man died after collapsing while dancing to music during Durga idol immersion procession here, police said on Tuesday. According to officials, it appears that the man died of a heart attack. The incident occurred near Ubhaon Mod of Ubhaon area on Monday night when Himanshu Kannaujiya lost control while dancing with others in the procession and collapsed, Rasra Circle Officer Mohammad Faheem Qureshi said. He was taken to Community Health Center in Siyar, where doctors declared him dead, Qureshi said. Additional District Magistrate Devendra Pratap Singh and Additional Superintendent of Police Anil Kumar Jha reached the spot after receiving the news, he said. "Initial indications suggest that Himanshu may have suffered a heart attack, but further investigation is underway," Qureshi added. The body has been sent for a postmortem, he said. *—PTI*

Actor Bhasi held after involvement in road accident

KOCHI, 15 OCT

Actor Sreenath Bhasi was arrested and later released on station bail in connection with a road accident in which a car he was allegedly traveling in collided with a bike and failed to stop, police said on Tuesday. The Ernakulam Central Police said it had registered a case against the actor following the incident, which occurred last month. The victim had sustained injuries after his bike was struck by the car. While Bhasi appeared before the police on Monday, his arrest was recorded, and he was released on bail, a police officer said, without elaborating. *—PTI*

An aerial view of a partially submerged area, in Chennai on Tuesday; According to IMD, Andhra Pradesh is likely to witness vigorous monsoon activity in coming days

PHOTOS: X

HEAVY RAINS LASH PARTS OF TN, ANDHRA

Low pressure likely to intensify into depression; 3-day school holidays due to cyclone alert in TN

AMARAVATI, 15 OCT

Heavy rains lashed several parts of Andhra Pradesh in the wake of a well-marked low pressure area over the Bay of Bengal, which moved from the southeast part of the sea towards west and northwestward direction and lay there on Tuesday morning.

The weather system is likely to intensify into a depression and continue to move west-northwestwards towards north Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and adjoining south Andhra Pradesh Coasts in the next two days, said the Meteorological Department in a release on Tuesday.

According to the Meteorological Department, coastal Andhra Pradesh and Yanam are likely to witness vigorous monsoon activity on Tuesday, with fairly widespread rainfall distribution.

A similar weather pattern has been forecast for Rayalaseema region of the southern state with widespread rainfall. Dozens of places received heavy rainfall. Kavali in Nellore district recorded a rainfall of 15 cm, followed by Addanki 14 cm, Kandukur 12 cm, Yanam 9 cm and Atmakur (Nellore) 8 cm, among others in coastal Andhra Pradesh region.

From Rayalaseema region, Kodur in YSR Kadapa district registered a rainfall of 10 cm, followed by Sullurpeta and Gudur (Tirupati) 7 cm and 6 cm respectively, among others.

Meanwhile, the Andhra Pradesh State Disaster Management Authority (APSDMA) noted that parts of West Godavari, Eluru, Krishna and NTR districts are likely to receive heavy to very heavy rainfall on Tuesday.

Rains lash Tamil Nadu

Overnight rains lashed Chennai and nearby areas and the India Meteorological Department on Tuesday said the low pressure area is likely to turn well marked soon.

While civic authorities said there has been no water stagnation in subways in view of preventive maintenance, water logging was seen in several places inconveniencing road users.

Since Monday night, Chennai and its suburbs, including those falling under nearby Tiruvallur district has been experiencing intermittent rains. The IMD said in a post on X said: "The low pressure area over southeast Bay of Bengal persisted over the same region at 11.30 pm on 14 October. It is likely to move west-northwestwards and become a well marked low pressure area over central parts of south Bay of Bengal by morning of today, the 15 October. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin on Monday took stock of the preparations and steps taken by authorities to tackle the situation that may arise in view of the heavy rain predicted by the met office.

The chief minister directed that the National Disaster Response Force and Tamil Nadu Disaster Response Force be deployed in advance in the areas prone to be affected.

—PTI

NTF meant to assess safety in hospitals must expedite work: SC

NEW DELHI, 15 OCT

The Supreme Court on Tuesday expressed its dissatisfaction over the slow progress made by the National Task Force (NTF), constituted to formulate a protocol for ensuring the safety and security of doctors and other health care professionals.

A bench headed by Chief Justice of India (CJI) DY Chandrachud noted that on the first meeting held on 27 August, the NTF constituted four sub-groups to engage with stakeholders and to prepare recommendations on the infrastructure of medical institutions, security systems, revamping working conditions of medical professionals and strengthening of the legal framework across all states.

The apex court, however, expressed its surprise over the NTF not holding any more meetings after 9 September.

Solicitor General of India Tushar Mehta, representing the Centre, submitted that an affidavit had been filed detailing the steps taken by the NTF so far. Mehta said NTF's works appeared to be "humoungous" and assured a long-lasting solution to the problems of healthcare professionals by the force.

He further assured the court that the NTF would expedite its work. "It appears that neither the National Task Force nor the sub-groups have made any substantial progress pursuant to the remit set in the orders of this court. The SG has accepted that no meeting appears to have been held since the first week of September 2024. We are of the view that the Union of India must take proactive efforts to ensure that the task of the task force is completed within a reasonable period in the future," noted the bench.

The Supreme Court also questioned the West Bengal government over hiring of civic volunteers in the state and sought data regarding their recruitment and appointment process. *—PTI*

WB Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee dances with TMC MPs and actors, at Red Road in Kolkata while doctors protest outside on Tuesday *PHOTO: PTI*

'Don't quash FIR if cognisable offence evident'

The Supreme Court has said when a First Information Report alleges dishonest conduct by an accused and materials disclose commission of a cognisable offence then the investigation cannot be thwarted by quashing the FIR. Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra said it was trite law that an FIR was not an encyclopedia of imputations.

Bharti's plea: SC issues notice to UP

The Supreme Court issued a fresh notice to the Uttar Pradesh government on AAP leader Somnath Bharti's plea seeking the transfer of a case filed against him for allegedly making derogatory remarks on the condition of hospitals. *—PTI*

SC declines plea to stop Punjab panchayat polls

NEW DELHI, 15 OCT

The Supreme Court on Tuesday refused to stay the ongoing panchayat elections in Punjab on grounds of alleged irregularities in the nomination process, saying there will be "chaos" if courts start staying elections on polling day.

The polling for panchayats began at 8 am on Tuesday in Punjab and the petitions, seeking a stay of the ongoing electoral process, were mentioned before a bench headed by Chief Justice of India (CJI) DY Chandrachud.

"If polling has started today, how can we intervene at this stage? Probably the high court realised the gravity of it and vacated the stay on the elections," the bench, which also comprised justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, said.

The top court, however, agreed to hear the pleas challenging the Punjab and Haryana High Court decision allowing panchayat polls in Punjab.

At the outset, a lawyer said the polling has started today and the high court disposed of around 1,000 petitions without a full fledged hearing.

The bench said probably the high court realised the gravity of the stay granted earlier and vacated the stay order.

With a total of 13,937 gram panchayats in the state, approximately 13.3 million voters are expected to participate in the elections. *—PTI*

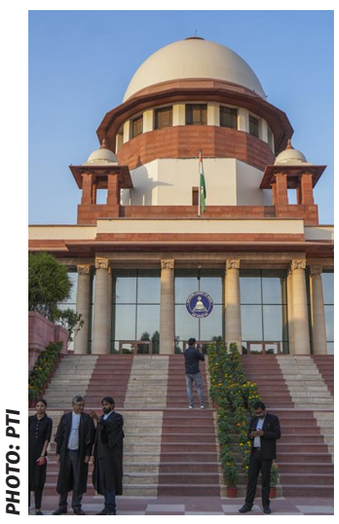


PHOTO: PTI

BIHAR GOVT RAISES PENALTY TO CURB ILLEGAL MINING IN STATE

PATNA, 15 OCT

The Bihar government on Tuesday announced hefty penalties of up to Rs 10 lakh for vehicles involved in illegal mining activities. The decision was taken during a cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar.

Additional Chief Secretary S Siddharth said, "The cabinet approved a proposal from the state's mines and geology department to increase penalties aimed at curbing illegal mining." He said according the new penalty structure, tractors used for transporting illegally mined products will face a fine of Rs 1 lakh, up from the previous Rs 25,000. Penalties for dumpers and trucks will rise to Rs 8 lakh from Rs 6 lakh, and earth-moving machines will incur a fine of Rs 10 lakh, he added. These increased fines are designed to deter people from engaging in illegal mining activities, he said.

Siddharth emphasised that the penalties will be in addition to any fines imposed for environmental damage. "All registered vehicles transporting mined materials must adhere to new guidelines, including using a red-colour code and ensuring that the materials are covered. Non-compliance will result in further penalties as outlined in the new regulations," he said. *—PTI*

Seven flights get bomb threats via X

NEW DELHI, 15 OCT

Seven flights, including one bound for the United States, received bomb-threat messages through a social media handle on Tuesday, prompting security agencies to undertake specific counter-terrorist drills at various airports, official sources said.

The threats via microblogging platform X came a day after three international flights originating from Mumbai received bomb threats, causing trouble to hundreds of passengers and airline crew. The messages posted on Monday were declared a hoax.

The sources said an X handle issued threats on Tuesday to five flights -- an Air India Express flight from Jaipur to Bengaluru via Ayodhya (IX765), a SpiceJet flight from Darbhanga to Mumbai (SG116), an Akasa Air flight from Bagdogra to Bengaluru (QP 1373), an Air India flight from Delhi to Chicago (AI 127) and an Indigo flight from Dammam (Saudi Arabia) to Lucknow (6E 98).

PHOTO: PTI

An Air India Express spokesperson told PTI in a statement that they, along with a few other operators, received a "specific" security threat from an unverified social media handle.

The SpiceJet aircraft landed safely at the Mumbai Airport and was directed to an isolation bay as a precautionary measure.

An Akasa Air spokesperson said their flight received a security alert on board. The Air India flight was diverted to the Iqaluit airport in Canada after it became the "subject of a security threat posted online". "The aircraft and passengers are being re-screened according to the laid-down security protocol. Air India has activated agencies at the airport to assist the passengers until such time that their journey can resume," an AI spokesperson said.

Indigo said in a statement that it was "cognisant of a situation involving flight 6E 98 from Dammam to Lucknow". The Dammam-Lucknow flight landed at the Jaipur airport following its diversion. The aircraft has been sent to an isolation bay, an official at the Jaipur airport said.

The suspect X handle tagged the respective airline and some police handles, claiming that bombs were placed on these planes, the sources said. *—PTI*

CM'S ASSURANCE

Online registration not must to visit Sabarimala

T'PURAM, 15 OCT

The Kerala government on Tuesday made it clear that the pilgrims who visit Sabarimala without virtual queue booking will also be provided smooth darshan at the Lord Ayyappa temple.

The Pinarayi Vijayan government backtracked from its earlier decision to provide darshan only through online registration during the upcoming pilgrimage season amidst widespread protest.

Chief Minister Vijayan made the announcement in the Assembly, while replying to a submission by V Joy (CPI-M) in this regard.

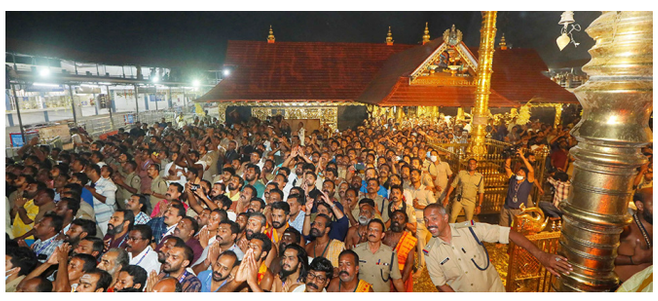
"Facilities for smooth darshan will be ensured for pilgrims who come without (online) registration as well... Darshan will be ensured to those who do not register online and those who come without knowing about the system," he said.

Similar facilities had been provided in the hill temple during the last pilgrim season as well, he said. However, the chief minister, during his brief speech, didn't clearly state whether the spot booking system would be maintained as it was in the previous year, along with the virtual queue booking.

An evaluation meeting, held on 5 October, had discussed allowing spot booking for pilgrims in Sabarimala, he said. The meeting also discussed measures to be taken to ensure secure and smooth darshan for all pilgrims reaching the hill temple, the Chief Minister explained.

The virtual queue system is running flawlessly at major pilgrim centres, including Tirupati, Vijayan said, adding that it was on this model that the online registration had been introduced in Sabarimala in 2011.

The objective of the government is to further strengthen the virtual queue system and implement it in an impeccable manner. *—PTI*



Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan made the announcement in the Assembly *PHOTO: PTI*

Rajnath to lay foundation stone for radar station in Telangana

HYDERABAD, 15 OCT

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh will be laying the foundation stone on Tuesday for the Indian Navy's proposed Very Low Frequency radar station at Damagundam forest area in Telangana, Union Minister G Kishan Reddy said.

Addressing a press conference, he said it was a proud moment for Telangana as the project, the second such centre in the country, is important in terms of national security.

Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy and Kishan Reddy will also take part in the foundation stone laying ceremony. Refuting the allegations made by BRS leader KT Rama Rao, that his party is opposing the construction of the radar station in Vikarabad District as it would create ecological imbalance, Reddy said it was the previous K Chandrasekhar Rao-led regime which gave land and permissions to the Centre.

Reddy further said the project was conceptualied in 2010 when Manmohan Singh was the prime minister. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

How did Indo-Canadian ties deteriorate ?

Relations between New Delhi and Ottawa hit new lows last year after the Canadian government said it was investigating a link between Indian government agents and the killing of a Sikh leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar **PHOTO: PTI**

A long-simmering diplomatic dispute between India and Canada has reignited, with the two countries announcing the expulsion of diplomats amid accusations that Indian government agents were involved in activities that threaten the safety of Canadians.

The latest row began on Monday when India's Ministry of External Affairs said it had received "diplomatic communication" from Canada indicating that Indian diplomats were being considered "persons of interest" in relation to an investigation in the North American country.

Relations between New Delhi and Ottawa hit new lows last year after the Canadian government said it was investigating a link between Indian government agents and the killing of a Sikh separatist leader, Hardeep Singh Nijjar, on Canada's west coast.

New Delhi has denied any involvement in Nijjar's killing, reiterating on Monday that it "strongly" rejected the "preposterous imputations" from Canada and would be withdrawing its diplomats and other officials from the country.

But hours later, the Canadian government said federal police had uncovered evidence that Indian agents were involved in activities that threaten public safety in Canada and it said it was expelling six Indian diplomats.

Here's what we know about the deepening diplomatic row, what Canada and India have said about the matter, and what could happen next:

What has Canada said?

● Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Monday that the federal Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) uncovered "clear and compelling evidence" that Indian government agents have engaged, and continue to engage, in activities that threaten public safety.

● "This includes clandestine information-gathering techniques, coercive behaviour targeting Canadians, and involvement in over a dozen threatening and violent acts, including murder," Trudeau said.

● RCMP said it had found evidence of the involvement of Indian government agents "in serious criminal activity in Canada", including links "to homicides and violent acts" and interference in democratic processes, among other things.

● "This evidence was presented directly to Government of India officials, urging their cooperation in stemming the violence and requesting our law enforcement agencies work together to address these issues," the RCMP said in a statement.

● Canada's foreign affairs department, Global Affairs Canada, then announced that six Indian diplomats and consular officials were being expelled from the country "in relation to a targeted campaign against Canadian citizens by agents linked to the Government of India".

● India's high commissioner to Canada was among those directed to leave.

● In a statement, Minister of Foreign Affairs Melanie Joly directly tied the Indian officials to Nijjar's case: "The decision to expel these individuals was made with great consideration and only after the RCMP gathered ample, clear and concrete evidence which identified six individuals as persons of interest in the Nijjar case," she said.

What has India said?

● Ministry of External Affairs vehemently rejected Canada's allegations, saying in a statement on Monday that "on the pretext of an investigation, there is a deliberate strategy of smearing India for political gains".

● It also said that the Canadian government "has not shared a shred of evidence" with the Indian government, "despite many requests from our side".

● Later, the Ministry said it had summoned Canada's charge d'affaires in India to inform him that "the baseless targeting of the Indian High Commissioner and other diplomats and officials in Canada was completely unacceptable".

● "We have no faith in the current Canadian Government's commitment to ensure their security. Therefore, the Government of India has decided to withdraw the High Commissioner and other targeted diplomats and officials," it said, adding that New Delhi "reserves the right to take further steps" in response.

● Then – in a tit-for-tat move – the Ministry announced that it was expelling six Canadian diplomats from India, including the acting high commissioner, and was giving them until the end of the day on 19 October to leave India.

How did India-Canada ties reach this point?

● Tensions between the two countries skyrocketed in September 2023 after Trudeau announced that Canadian authorities were investigating "credible allegations of a potential link" between Indian government agents and the killing of Nijjar, a Canadian citizen.

● Nijjar was fatally shot on 18 June, 2023, outside a Sikh temple where he served as president, in Surrey, British Columbia. He had been a leading advocate in what is known as the Khalistan movement, a Sikh campaign for a sovereign state in India's Punjab region.

● While largely dormant inside India itself, Sikh separatism is largely viewed as a threat by the Indian government, which has urged Western nations to crack down on Khalistan movement leaders in the diaspora.

● India vehemently denied the allegations that it was involved in Nijjar's killing, calling them "absurd". It also accused Nijjar of being involved in "terrorism" – a claim rejected by his supporters. After Canada's accusations were first made public, the two countries withdrew their respective diplomats and India also put a freeze on diplomatic services for Canadians.

● The tensions boiled over again in May 2024 when Canadian police said they had arrested three men – all Indian nationals – accused of being involved in Nijjar's killing. The RCMP said at the time that it was also "investigating if there are any ties to the government of India".

● A fourth man, also an Indian national, was arrested and charged in Nijjar's killing later that month.

● New Delhi rejected the developments in Canada, with Minister of External Affairs Subrahmanyam Jaishankar saying the country had a "political compulsion" to blame India.

What comes next?

● It remains to be seen if India, as its foreign ministry said on Monday, would take "further steps" in response to Canada's accusations – and if it does, what those steps could entail.

● Stephanie Carvin, a political analyst and professor at Carleton University in the Canadian capital of Ottawa, said the latest accusations by Canada were "very serious" and risked further hampering relations with India. That "puts Canada in a difficult position", she said

● "We're in a time where we see countries around the world – the European Union, the United States, Australia … trying to develop their relations with India. This kind of puts us offside all of the other allies that we have," she told Al Jazeera.

● Practically, Carvin also noted that Canada is home to a sizeable South Asian population and a large number of Indian students study in the country as well. "These Indian [nationals], they do need consular services, they need diplomatic representation in this country," she said.

● Sikh Canadians told Al Jazeera over the past year that their community – which numbers about 7,70,000 people across Canada and makes up the largest Sikh diaspora outside India – had concerns about Indian state interference. The World Sikh Organisation of Canada, a nonprofit that advocates for the community, said it welcomed the Canadian government's announcement on Monday and demanded "the full prosecution of all individuals involved" in Nijjar's killing, including Indian diplomats. "The Government of India's ongoing foreign interference activities in Canada and its history of targeting Sikhs is only now becoming known to the public but has been the lived experience of Sikhs for the past four decades," it said. *—Courtesy, Al Jazeera*

SALAR ساڈھ

Israel's bombing displaced 4L Lebanese children in 3 weeks

More than 4,00,000 children in Lebanon have been displaced in the past three weeks, a top official with the UN children's agency said Monday, warning of a "lost generation" in the small country grappling with multiple crises and now in the middle of war.

Israel has escalated its campaign against the Lebanon-based Hezbollah militant group, including launching a ground invasion, after a year of exchanges of fire during its war with Hamas in Gaza.

The fighting in Lebanon has driven 1.2 million people from their homes, most of them fleeing to Beirut and elsewhere in the north over the past three weeks since the escalation.

Ted Chaiban, UNICEF's Deputy Executive Director for humanitarian actions, has visited schools that have been turned into shelters to host displaced families.

"What struck me is that this war is three weeks old and so many children have been affected," Chaiban told The Associated Press in Beirut.

"As we sit here today, 1.2 million children are deprived of education. Their public schools have either been rendered inaccessible, have been damaged by the war or are being used as shelters. The last thing this country needs, in addition to everything else it has gone through, is the risk of a lost generation."

While some Lebanese private schools are still operating, the public school system has been badly affected by the war, along with the country's most vulnerable people such as Palestinian and Syrian refugees.

"What I'm worried about is that we have hundreds of thousands of Lebanese, Syrian, Palestinian children that are at risk of losing their learning," Chaiban said.

More than 2,300 people in Lebanon have been killed in Israeli strikes, nearly 75 per cent of them over the last month, according to the Health Ministry. In the last three weeks, more than 100 children were killed and over 800 were wounded, Chaiban said.

He said displaced children are crammed into overcrowded shelters where three or four families can live in a classroom separated by a plastic sheet, and where 1,000 people can share 12 toilets. Not all of them work.

Many displaced families found have set up tents along roads or on public beaches.

Most displaced children have experienced so much violence, including the sounds of shelling or gunshots, that they cower at any loud noise, Chaiban said.

Then there is "evacuation orders upon evacuation orders. We're at the beginning, and already there's been a profound impact," he said.

The escalation has also put over 100 primary health care facilities out of service, while 12 hospitals are either no longer working or partially functional.

Water infrastructure has also come under attack. In the last three weeks, 26 water stations providing water to almost 3 ,50,000 people have been damaged, Chaiban said. UNICEF is working with local authorities to repair them. He called for civilian infrastructure to be protected. And he appealed for a cease-fire in Lebanon and in Gaza, saying there needs to be political will and a realization that the conflict cannot be resolved through military means.

"What we must do is make sure that this stops, that this madness stops, that there's a cease-fire before we get to the kind of destruction and pain and suffering and death that we've seen in Gaza," Chaiban said. With so many needs, he said, the emergency response appeal for USD 108 million in Lebanon has only been 8 per cent funded three weeks into the escalation. *—PTI*

- While some Lebanese private schools are still operating, the public school system has been badly affected by the war, along with the country's most vulnerable people such as Palestinian and Syrian refugees.
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In the last three weeks, more than 100 children were killed and over 800 were wounded **PHOTO: UNICEF**

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

M'rashtra polls to test electoral arithmetic, chemistry among allies

With half a dozen key players post splits in the Shiv Sena and NCP, a fragmented polity, Maratha quota stir and a spirited opposition, Maharashtra will see a riveting contest in the assembly polls amid dramatic changes since the last elections.

Elections to the 288-member assembly, the second largest after Uttar Pradesh (403), will be held on November 20 in a single phase and counting of votes will be on November 23, the Election Commission announced on Tuesday.

The Nanded Lok Sabha bypoll, necessitated due to the death of Congress MP Vasant Chavan, will also be held on 20 November.

The Mahayuti government led by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde is banking on its flagship scheme, Ladki Bahin Yojana, under which poor women get a monthly stipend of Rs 1,500, to sway voters after the ruling bloc's poor show in the Lok Sabha polls.

The Rs 46,000-crore a year welfare scheme is being widely seen as a "game changer" for the ruling bloc which comprises the BJP, Shinde's Shiv Sena and the NCP led by Deputy CM Ajit Pawar, who joined the government just over a year ago after parting ways with his uncle Sharad Pawar.

The government's target is to cover 2.5 crore beneficiaries under the scheme. There are about 4.5 crore women voters in Maharashtra.

The Mahayuti is in a direct fight with Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA). Mahayuti coalition comprises BJP, Shiv Sena led by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, and NCP led by Ajit Pawar. In contrast, MVA consists of Congress, NCP faction led by Sharad Pawar and Shiv Sena (UBT) **PHOTOS: PTI/ANI**

The Mahayuti (grand alliance) is in a direct fight with the opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) in a state where splits within major parties and realignments in the last five years have led to tectonic shift in political dynamics.

The MVA consists of the Congress, Shiv Sena (UBT) and Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) faction led by veteran politician Sharad Pawar.

Both the MVA and the Mahayuti are yet to announce their seat-sharing deals.

The ensuing Assembly polls, the first since the splits in the Shiv Sena in 2022 and the NCP a year later, will be a test of strength for the two major alliances and will also indicate the ability of their individual constituents to transfer votes to each other.

Even though the Lok Sabha elections saw the ruling alliance (which won 17 of 48 seats) suffering a jolt and the opposition MVA (30 seats) performing well, the assembly polls are going to be a different political ball game as state and local-level issues will dominate campaigning.

Maharashtra's political climate has never been more fragmented, with six main parties vying for influence: BJP, Shiv Sena, NCP, Congress, Shiv Sena (UBT), and NCP (SP).

This fragmentation is a product of recent political upheavals, including the collapse of the MVA government and the emergence of new political factions. The last five years have been unprecedented in Maharashtra politics -- collapse of a pre-poll alliance, three regimes, including a three-day government, splits in two major parties with the Election Commission recognizing the breakaway groups as "real".

The murder of former state minister and NCP leader Baba Siddique on Dasara (12 October) raised concerns about law and order and came as an embarrassment for the Mahayuti government ahead of the polls.

The Opposition was quick to target the government, especially Home Minister Devendra Fadnavis, over the killing and highlight issues of public safety and governance.

In the last fortnight, the Shinde government has taken a staggering 1,500 decisions, including around 160 in state cabinet meetings. These include the toll waiver for light motor vehicles at all five entry points into Mumbai.

Despite reports that Ajit Pawar may walk out of the ruling alliance, he has stayed put. Maharashtra saw a change in government mid-way in June 2022 when the MVA government led by Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray collapsed following a rebellion in his party Shiv Sena.

Shinde then succeeded Thackeray as Chief Minister with BJP support.

The 2019 assembly polls changed several dynamics. First, a pre-poll alliance between the Shiv Sena-BJP snapped over the issue of chief ministership. Later, Shiv Sena joined hands with its traditional rivals Congress and the NCP to form a government under Thackeray's leadership. Congress leader Ratnakar Mahajan said BJP is facing erosion in its voter base, while the grand old party has gained people's trust by raising key issues like agrarian distress, unemployment and inflation.

Mahajan asserted the Congress is not complacent after its encouraging Lok Sabha poll show— the party won 13 seats in Maharashtra— and it continues to highlight pro-people issues.

He said the collapse of a Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj statue in Sindhudurg district, poor law and order situation, Maratha quota and agrarian distress were some of the issues the opposition is highlighting.

The Maratha quota demand, an issue which hurt the Mahayuti in the Lok Sabha polls, continues to resonate with a significant voter base, according to analysts.

In 2019, BJP bagged 105 seats, emerging as the single largest party, while its then-ally Shiv Sena won 56. Congress and its ally NCP contested 125 seats each and won 44 and 54, respectively. *—PTI*

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Amid cancer, King Charles III to visit Australia, Samoa

LONDON, 15 OCT

King Charles III, who is 75 and battling cancer, will travel halfway around the world to Samoa this month to take his seat as the head of the Commonwealth and highlight the existential threat that climate change poses for Pacific island nations. He will also return to Australia, a country that played a key role in Charles' adolescence — giving him the chance to be an almost normal teenager during the six months he spent at Timbertop school outside Melbourne in the 1960s. The visit marks the first time since he assumed the throne that Charles will visit one of the 14 countries outside the United Kingdom where the monarch is head of state. The tour starts on Friday and will end on 26 October. *—PTI*

Afghan media stops showing images of living beings

ISLAMABAD, 15 OCT

Taliban run-media have stopped showing images of living beings in some Afghan provinces to comply with morality laws, an official confirmed Tuesday. In August, the country's Vice and Virtue Ministry published laws regulating aspects of everyday life like public transportation, shaving, the media and celebrations reflecting authorities' interpretation of Islamic law, or Sharia. Article 17 bans the publication of images of living beings, sparking concerns about the consequences for Afghan media and press freedom. No other Muslim-majority country imposes similar restrictions, including Iran and Saudi Arabia. *—PTI*

China unveils plans to turn space feats into explorations

BEIJING, 15 OCT

China has made great strides in exploring space in recent years, rocketing astronauts to its own space station and bringing back rocks from the moon. Now it wants to turn those feats into scientific advances. The nation's leading scientific institute laid out an ambitious plan on Tuesday to become a global leader in space science by 2050. It listed a wide range of research areas including black holes, Mars and Jupiter, and the search for habitable planets and signs of extraterrestrial life. Besides putting a space station into orbit, the space agency has landed an explorer on Mars. It aims to put a person on the moon before 2030, which would make China the second nation after the United States to do so. *—PTI*

After 67 days adrift, Russian man rescued

MOSCOW, 15 OCT

A Russian man was rescued in the stormy Sea of Okhotsk after surviving for more than two months in a tiny inflatable boat that lost its engine, but his brother and nephew have died, officials said Tuesday. The prosecutor's office in the far east of Russia said that the man was rescued Monday by a fishing vessel off the Kamchatka Peninsula. It didn't name the survivor, but Russian news reports identified him as 46-year-old Mikhail Pichugin, who in early August set on a journey to watch whales in the Sea of Okhotsk together with his 49-year-old brother and 15-year-old nephew. They went missing after setting off on their way back to Sakhalin Island on 9 August. Reportedly, the trio had a small food ration and about 20 litres of water when their engine failed. Pichugin weighed just about 50kg when he was found, having lost half of his body weight. He didn't immediately say how he managed to survive in the Sea of Okhotsk, the coldest sea in East Asia and known for its gales. *—PTI*

N Korea blows up roads connecting to South after warnings

South claims it counter fired in retaliation

SEOUL, 15 OCT

In a symbolic display of anger, North Korea on Tuesday blew up the northern section of unused roads that once linked it with the South, with the rivals exchanging threats days after the North claimed that its rival flew drones over its capital Pyongyang.

The roads' choreographed demolition underlines North Korea's growing anger against South Korea's conservative government. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has vowed to sever relations with South Korea and abandon the goal of achieving peaceful Korean unification.

Observers say it's unlikely Kim will launch a pre-emptive, large-scale attack on South Korea because of fear that an almost certain massive retaliation by the more superior forces of the United States and South Korea would threaten Pyongyang's survival.

In response to the explosions, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said its military fired within southern sections of the border as it bolstered its readiness and surveillance posture.

The statement did not give details, but the move could have been an attempt to avert cross-border fire by North Korea. South Korea's Unification Ministry, which handles affairs with North Korea, separately condemned the North's detonations as a "highly abnormal" and "regressive" measure that violates previous inter-Korean agreements.

Video provided by South Korea's military showed a cloud of white and gray smoke emerging from the explosion at a road near the western border town of Kaesong. North Korean trucks and excavators could be seen clearing out debris. Another video showed smoke emerging from a coastal road near the eastern border. *—PTI*

A video shows a cloud of smoke emerging from the explosion at a road near the western border of South's Kaesong *PHOTO: SCREENGRAB*

PHOTO: X@SPRINTERFAMILY

EU sanctions Iran for giving missiles to Russia

BRUSSELS, 15 OCT

European Union announced sanctions against more than a dozen Iranian individuals and firms, including the country's deputy defence minister and national airline, over the alleged transfer of missiles and drones to Russia.

The European Council said on Monday that seven individuals and as many entities in total would be subject to an asset freeze and travel ban over their involvement in transferring weapons and equipment to Moscow for use in its war against Ukraine.

Those targeted include Iranian Deputy Defence Minister Seyed Hamzeh Ghalandari, high-ranking members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' Quds Force, and three Iranian airlines, including Iran Air.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen welcomed the sanctions.

Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman Esmail Baghaei on Tuesday denied that Tehran had supplied missiles to Russia and condemned the sanctions as contrary to international law.

The latest sanctions come after the United States last month said it had intelligence indicating that Iran had supplied Russia with ballistic missiles to use in Ukraine.

Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian at the time denied that Tehran had transferred any weapons to Russia since his administration took power in August, acknowledging it was "possible that a delivery took place in the past".

EU member countries, apart from Hungary, have provided military and economic support to Ukraine worth some 118 billion euros ($129bn) since Russia launched its full-scale invasion in February 2022. *—Courtesy, Al Jazeera*

Imran's party calls off protests ahead of SCO meet in Pak

ISLAMABAD, 15 OCT

Pakistan's main opposition called off its protest on Tuesday as the 23rd meeting of the Council of the Heads of Government (CHG) of the member states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation begins here under tight security.

The two-day meeting will discuss ongoing cooperation in fields of economy, trade, environment and socio-cultural linkages and review the performance of the Organisation.

Pakistan assumed the rotating chair of the SCO CHG, the second highest forum within the SCO, for 2023-24 at the previous meeting, held in Bishkek in October 2023. The CHG meeting will be chaired by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

Chinese Premier Li Qiang, Belarus Prime Minister Roman Golovchenko, Kazakhstan Prime Minister Olzhas Bektenov, Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin, Tajik Prime Minister Kohir Rasulzoda, Uzbek Prime Minister Abdulla Aripov, Kyrgyzstan's Chairman of Ministers Cabinet Zhaparov Akylbek, Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref, and Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar are participating. PTI agreed to call off its protest after the assurance by the government that a medical team would be allowed to meet its jailed leader 72-year-old Imran Khan. *—PTI*

CHINA REACTS AFTER 230 NATIONALS ARRESTED IN LANKA

COLOMBO, 15 OCT

The Chinese Embassy on Tuesday said it is closely following the arrest of several of its nationals in Sri Lanka for allegedly being involved in online fraud and process for their repatriation is underway.

Sri Lankan police said over 230 Chinese nationals between the ages of 22 and 49 have been arrested from different parts of the island in the last fortnight.

The Chinese nationals were arrested for allegedly overstaying their visit visas and being party to online scams conducted from Sri Lanka.

The Chinese Embassy in a statement said it is closely following the recent reports that Sri Lankan police arrested several foreign suspects of online fraud, including Chinese nationals.

The Chinese government has taken note of this and promotes cooperation in the anti-online fraud law enforcement between the two countries, the statement added. *—PTI*

Israeli strikes on Gaza kill at least 15 overnight

Israeli Iron Dome air defence system fires to intercept rockets that were launched from Lebanon, in northern Israel, on Monday *PHOTO: PTI*

JERUSALEM, 15 OCT

Israeli strikes in the southern Gaza Strip killed at least 15 people overnight, including six children and two women, Palestinian medical officials said on Tuesday.

In northern Gaza, where Israel has been waging an air and ground campaign in Jabaliya for more than a week, residents said families were still trapped in their homes and shelters.

It's been more than a year since Isreal started its assault on Gaza.

Israel's offensive in Gaza has killed over 42,000 Palestinians. The

head of the expeditionary arm of Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard has appeared in television footage aired Tuesday by Iranian state television.

Rumours circulated for weeks over Gen. Esmail Qaani's status in the time since an Israeli airstrike that killed Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah in Beirut in late September. But Qaani, the head of the Quds Force, was seen in a black bomber jacket, wiping away tears at an event early Tuesday morning at Tehran's Mehrabad International Airport.

Australia's government has imposed targeted financial sanctions and travel bans on five Iranians contributing to the country's missile defence programme, Foreign Minister Penny Wong said on Tuesday.*—PTI*

UN flays Israel for targeting peacekeepers

UNITED NATIONS, 15 OCT

The UN Security Council expressed "strong concern" on Monday as Israel has fired on and wounded UN peacekeepers in southern Lebanon during intensified fighting, reiterating its support for their role in supporting security in the region.

It's the first statement by the UN's most powerful body since Israel's attacks on the positions of the peacekeeping force known as UNIFIL began last week, drawing international condemnation.

The statement comes as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu escalated his rhetoric against the UN peacekeepers, calling on them to "heed Israel's request and to temporarily get out of harm's way".

UN peacekeeping chief Jean-Marie Lacroix told reporters that Secretary-General António Guterres confirmed Monday that peacekeepers will remain in all their positions even as Israel has urged the peacekeepers to move 5km north during its ground invasion in Lebanon. *—PTI*

Israel faces shortage of interceptor missiles: Report

Jerusalem, 15 Oct

PHOTO: X@MARIONAWFAL

Israel is encountering a potential shortage of rocket and missile interceptors in its air defence array amid the yearlong war in Gaza and Lebanon, and as it prepares for a possible escalating conflict with Iran, according to a British report Tuesday. Citing experts and former military officials, the Financial Times said that Washington is assisting the Jewish state in addressing the matter, in particular through its promise to send a Terminal High Altitude Area Defense missile system (THAAD), but Jerusalem could increasingly find itself needing to decide which targets it wants to prioritize defending. "Israel's munitions issue is serious," Dana Stroul, an ex-US defense official, said. "If Iran responds to an Israel attack, and Hezbollah joins in too, Israel's air defences will be stretched." *—Times of Israel*

6 people accuse rapper Diddy of sexual assault in new lawsuits

NEW YORK, 15 OCT

Sean "Diddy" Combs was hit Monday with a new wave of lawsuits accusing him of raping women, sexually assaulting men and molesting a 16-year-old boy — the first time he's been sued by a person alleging they were abused as a minor.

At least six lawsuits were filed against Combs in federal court in Manhattan, adding to a growing list of legal claims against the indicted hip-hop mogul, all of which he has denied. The lawsuits were filed anonymously to protect the identities of the accusers, two by women identified as Jane Does and four by men identified as John Does.

Some of the Does, echoing others who've accused Combs in recent months, allege that he used his fame and the promise of potential stardom to entice victims to lavish parties or drug-fuelled hangouts where he then assaulted them.

Some allege that he beat or drugged them. Others say he threatened to kill them if they didn't do as he pleased or if they spoke out against him.

PHOTO: X@POPCRAVE

The plaintiffs in Monday'

The lawsuits describe alleged assaults dating to the mid-1990s, including at Combs' celebrity-studded white parties in Long Island's Hamptons, at a party in Brooklyn celebrating Combs' then-collaborator Biggie Smalls, and even in the storeroom at Macy's flagship department store in midtown Manhattan. s lawsuits are part of what their lawyers say is a group of more than 100 alleged victims who are in the process of taking legal action following Combs' 16 September arrest on federal racketeering conspiracy and sex trafficking charges. Combs, 54, has pleaded not guilty in his criminal case. *—PTI*

'PRICES WILL RISE'

Trump's economic plans will worsen inflation: Experts

WASHINGTON, 15 OCT

With characteristic bravado, Donald Trump has vowed that if voters return him to the White House, "inflation will vanish completely".

It's a message tailored for Americans who are still exasperated by the jump in consumer prices that began 3 1/2 years ago.

Yet most mainstream economists say Trump's policy proposals wouldn't vanquish inflation. They'd make it worse. They warn that his plans to impose huge tariffs on imported goods, deport millions of migrant workers and demand a voice in the Federal Reserve's interest rate policies would likely send prices surging.

Sixteen Nobel Prize-winning economists signed a letter in June expressing fear that Trump's proposals would "reignite" inflation, which has plummeted since peaking at 9.1 per cent in 2022 and is nearly back to the Fed's 2 per cent target.

- Sixteen Nobel Prize-winning economists signed a letter in June expressing fear that Trump's proposals would "reignite" inflation.

Last month, the Peterson Institute for International Economics predicted that Trump's policies would drive consumer prices sharply higher two years into his second term. Peterson's analysis concluded that inflation, which would otherwise register 1.9 per cent in 2026, would instead jump to between 6 per cent and 9.3 per cent if Trump's economic proposals were adopted.

Most mainstream economists say Donald Trump's policy proposals wouldn't vanquish inflation *PHOTO: ANI*

Many economists aren't thrilled with Vice President Kamala Harris' economic agenda, either. They dismiss, for example, her proposal to combat price gouging as an ineffective tool against high grocery prices. But they don't regard her policies as particularly inflationary.

Moody's Analytics has estimated that Harris' policies would leave the inflation outlook virtually unchanged, even if she enjoyed a Democratic majority in both chambers of Congress. An unfettered Trump, by contrast, would leave prices higher by 1.1 percentage points in 2025 and 0.8 percentage points in 2026. Kimberly Clausing and Mary Lovely of the Peterson Institute have calculated that Trump's proposed 60 per cent tax on Chinese imports and his high-end 20 per cent tariff on everything else would, in combination, impose an after-tax loss on a typical American household of USD 2,600 a year. *—PTI*

2 SHOT IN TRUMP RALLY BLAME SECRET SERVICE

BUTLER, 15 OCT

Two men who were shot during the first assassination attempt on Donald Trump this summer say the US Secret Service was "negligent" in protecting the former president and other bystanders at the campaign rally in Pennsylvania.

David Dutch, 57, an ex-Marine, and James Copenhaver, 74, a retired liquor store manager, told NBC News they were excited to be sitting in the bleachers behind the Republican nominee at the fairgrounds in Butler on 13 July when gunshots rang out and they were hit.

A 20-year-old shooter Thomas Matthew Crooks of Bethel Park, Pennsylvania, opened fire in July from an unsecured rooftop nearby before he was fatally shot by sharpshooters. *—PTI*

Hyundai IPO subscribed 18% on day 1

In India's biggest IPO, Hyundai's share sale raised ₹8,315 cr from anchor investors

NEW DELHI, 15 OCT

The initial public offer of Hyundai Motor India Ltd, the Indian arm of South Korean automaker Hyundai, received an 18 per cent subscription on the first day of bidding on Tuesday.

The Rs 27,870 crore initial share sale received bids for 1,77,89,457 shares against 9,97,69,810 shares on offer, as per NSE data.

The IPO received over 9 lakh applications on the first day.

The portion for retail individual investors (RIIs) subscribed 26 per cent, while the non-institutional investors category fetched 13 per cent subscriptions. The quota for qualified institutional buyers (QIBs) garnered a 5 per cent subscription.

Hyundai Motor India Ltd (HMIL) on Monday raised Rs 8,315 crore from anchor investors.

This is the largest IPO in the country, surpassing LIC's initial share sale of Rs 21,000 crore.

The IPO, with a price band of Rs 1,865-1,960 per share, will remain open for public subscription from 15 October to 17 October.

The IPO is entirely an offer for sale (OFS) of 14,21,94,700 equity shares by promoter Hyundai Motor Company (HMC), with no fresh issue component.

This is the first initial share sale by an automaker in over two decades, following Japanese carmaker Maruti Suzuki's listing in 2003. The South Korean parent is diluting some of the stake through the OFS route.

Since the public issue is completely an OFS, Hyundai Motor India Ltd, the second largest carmaker in India after Maruti Suzuki, will not receive any proceeds from the IPO.

HMIL stated that it expects that the listing of the equity shares will enhance its visibility and brand image, and provide liquidity and a public market for the shares.

At the upper end of the price band, the IPO size has been pegged at Rs 27,870 crore (USD 3.3 billion), and the company's market valuation at around Rs 1.6 lakh crore (about USD 19 billion) post-issue.

HMIL commenced operations in India in 1996 and currently, sells 13 models across segments. —*PTI*

The IPO, with a price band of Rs 1,865-1,960 per share, will remain open for public subscription from 15 October to 17 October **PHOTO: PTI**

Gold retreats from record level; silver plunges ₹1,000

NEW DELHI, 15 OCT

AGold prices retreated from record high in the national capital on Tuesday, declining Rs 50 to Rs 78,650 per 10 grams following fresh selling by stockists and retailers, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity rose Rs 200 to revisit the all-time high level of Rs 78,700 per 10 grams on Monday. Silver prices plunged Rs 1,000 to Rs 92,500 per kg against the previous close of Rs 93,500 per kg. In addition, gold of 99.5 per cent purity decreased Rs 50 to Rs 78,250 per 10 grams. On Monday, it had finished at Rs 78,300 per 10 grams to reclaim its record high. However, silver contracts for December delivery slipped Rs 101, or 0.11 per cent, to Rs 90,635 per kg on the MCX. Globally, Comex gold rose 0.16 per cent to USD 2,669.90 per ounce. Silver went up 0.08 per cent to USD 31.34 per ounce in the overseas markets. —*PTI*

Rupee higher by 1P at 84.04 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 15 OCT

The rupee witnessed a range-bound trade and appreciated 1 paisa to 84.04 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday, as weak crude oil prices and suspected intervention by the Reserve Bank supported the local currency at lower levels. Forex traders said the rupee was weighed down by significant foreign fund outflows, a negative trend in domestic equities and the overall strength of the American currency in the overseas market. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 84.06 against the greenback and traded in a tight range of 84.03 and 84.07. The unit settled for the day at 84.04 (provisional), registering a rise of just 1 paisa over its previous close. On Monday, the rupee recovered from its all-time low levels and appreciated 5 paise to close at 84.05 against the US dollar. —*PTI*

Soyabean production reaches 126L tonnes: Data

INDORE, 15 OCT

Soybean production in the country has increased by about 6 per cent to nearly 126 lakh tonnes in the current kharif season due to favourable weather conditions, an organisation of the crop processors said on Tuesday. Its acreage remained almost the same as last season, the trade body said. During the last kharif season, the average productivity of soybean per hectare in the country was 1,002 kg, while this time it has increased to 1,063 kg, Soybean Processors Association of India (SOPA) Executive Director D N Pathak told PTI. As per the SOPA's estimate, during the kharif season in the country this time, soybean was sown in 118.32 lakh hectares and its yield was 125.82 lakh tonnes. India imports about 60 per cent of its edible oil requirements. In such a situation, experts feel that to achieve the ambitious target of self-sufficiency in the production of edible oils, there is a need to increase the production of major oilseed crops. —*PTI*

Avaada Energy closes refinancing of K'taka projects

KOLKATA, 15 OCT

Avaada Energy on Tuesday said it has successfully closed refinancing of around Rs 597 crore for its solar projects in Karnataka and Maharashtra. The leading renewable energy Independent Power Producer (IPP) and an arm of Avaada Group in a statement announced the successful closure of approximately Rs 597 crore (around USD 71.1 million) in refinancing for its Commercial & Industrial (C&I) solar projects in the states of Karnataka and Maharashtra. The refinancing was secured from NIIF Infrastructure Finance Ltd (NIIF IFL), an infrastructure debt fund dedicated to refinancing.. —*PTI*

Sunil Mittal joins Ambani to pitch for satellite spectrum

Rivals join hands to buy airwaves for their telecom services

NEW DELHI, 15 OCT

Telecom czar Sunil Bharti Mittal on Tuesday joined his rival Mukesh Ambani-led Jio, to make a strong case for satellite companies paying license fee as well as buying airwaves for their telecom services just like legacy companies do, in a bid to create a level-playing field.

Speaking at the India Mobile Conference, Mittal, who heads India's second largest telecom firm Bharti Airtel, said existing telecom companies will take satellite services into the remotest parts.

"And those satellite companies who have ambitions to come into urban areas, serving retail customers, just need to pay the telecom licenses like everyone else. They are bound to the same conditions.

"They need to buy the spectrum as the telecom companies do, and need to pay the license as the telecom companies do, and also secure the networks of the telecom companies," he said.

Last week, Ambani's Reliance Jio had written to Telecom Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia opposing the telecom regulator TRAI's recommendation of satellite broadband being allocated and not auctioned.

Elon Musk's Starlink and global peers like Amazon's Project Kuiper back an administrative allocation. —*PTI*

Any such decision to auction as Reliance is lobbying for would be unprecedented

- Elon Musk, Starlink CEO

Sunil Bharti Mittal and Mukesh Ambani **PHOTO: PTI**

Reliance & Disney to complete merger by end of 3rd quater

The merger of media assets of Reliance Industries and the India business of global media house Walt Disney is expected to be completed by the end of the third quarter of this fiscal, according to a regulatory filing by Mukesh Ambani-led group. The fair trade regulator, the Competition Commission of India (CCI), has already approved the merger of Viacom18 and Star India. The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) has sanctioned the merger scheme. The merger of the media assets of Reliance Industries and The Walt Disney Co.'s India business will create the country's largest media empire worth over Rs 70,000 crore.

Reliance shares down over 1% post Q2 earnings

Shares of Reliance Industries Ltd declined over 1 per cent in morning trade on Tuesday after the firm reported a 5 per cent fall in the July-September quarter net profit. The bellwether stock went lower by 1.15 per cent to Rs 2,713.55 on the BSE. At the NSE, it dipped 1.13 per cent to Rs 2,713.80 apiece. Its consolidated net profit fell to Rs 16,563 crore or Rs 24.48 per share in July-September - the second quarter of the current fiscal - compared to Rs Rs 17,394 crore or Rs 25.71 a share in the same period a year back, according to a company statement. On the other hand, the firm's other two main businesses - retail and telecom - saw steady performance. —*PTI*

Akash Ambani wants Indian data to be stored locally

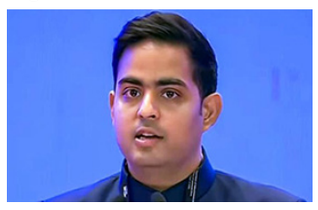
NEW DELHI, 15 OCT

India should urgently embrace AI with a holistic strategy driven by maximum "Atmanirbhar" efforts, Akash M Ambani, Chairman of Reliance Jio Infocomm said on Tuesday, as he made a strong pitch for Indian data to remain in India's data centres.

Speaking at the inauguration of IMC and ITUWTSA 2024, Ambani urged the government to expedite the process of updating the Data Centre Policy 2020 draft so that Indian data should remain in India's data centres.

"... The scale and speed of multilingual data generation in India, which will drive the AI revolution, will grow exponentially. We request the government to expedite the updating of the 2020 draft of the Data Centre Policy that Indian data should remain in India's data centres," he said.

Ambani termed AI as a revolutionary tool for transformation of every area including healthcare, education, agriculture and manufacturing. —*PTI*



Akash M Ambani **PHOTO: PTI**

NIFTY FALLS 70.6 PTS

Sensex falls by 153 pts, Nifty settles at 25,057

MUMBAI, 15 OCT

Benchmark stock indices closed lower on Tuesday following losses in bellwether Reliance Industries and retail inflation hitting a nine-month high in September.

Paring early gains, the BSE Sensex declined 152.93 points or 0.19 per cent to settle at 81,820.12. During the day, it fell by 337.48 points or 0.41 per cent to a low of 81,635.57.

The NSE Nifty settled lower by 70.60 points or 0.28 per cent to 25,057.35.

From the 30 Sensex firms, Bajaj Finance, Reliance Industries, Tata Steel, JSW Steel, Tech Mahindra, Tata Motors, Kotak Mahindra Bank and Maruti were the biggest laggards.

ICICI Bank, Bharti Airtel, Asian Paints, Adani Ports, UltraTech Cement and HCL Technologies were among the gainers.

IT services major HCL Technologies (HCLTech) on Monday reported a 10.51 per cent increase in consolidated net profit to Rs 4,235 crore in the July-September quarter of FY25, as the company raised the lower band of its growth guidance on the back of better-than-expected performance.

Soaring vegetable prices pushed the retail inflation rate to a nine-month high of 5.49 per cent in September, according to government data released on Monday. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

- From the 30 Sensex firms, Bajaj Finance, Reliance Industries, Tata Steel, JSW Steel, Tech Mahindra, Tata Motors, Kotak Mahindra Bank and Maruti were the biggest laggards

Ola Electric rises 5% amid strong festive sales

MUMBAI, 15 OCT

Shares of electric two-wheeler maker Ola Electric Mobility Ltd rebounded up to 5 per cent on Tuesday, ending a three-day losing streak.

The company gained a significant market share, driven by rising demand in the festive season.

Bhavish Aggarwal-led Ola Electric shares surged by 5 per cent to hit a high of Rs 91.87 per share on the NSE in morning deals. —*PTI*

SpiceJet settles $23.39M dispute with 2 lessors

MUMBAI, 15 OCT

Budget carrier SpiceJet on Tuesday said it has successfully settled a USD 23.39 million dispute with two aircraft lessors -- Aircastle and Wilmington Trust, days after amicably resolving a similar dispute with a US-based aircraft leasing firm, BBAM.

As part of the settlement, all ongoing litigation and disputes between the parties will be withdrawn at appropriate forums, the airline said in a statement.

SpiceJet has "successfully settled" a USD 23.39-million dispute with Aircastle (Ireland) Designated Activity Company and Wilmington Trust SP Services (Dublin) Ltd for an aggregate sum of USD 5-million, together with agreement in relation to the treatment of certain aircraft engines, the statement added.

Both parties have reached this agreement through amicable negotiations, choosing to resolve the matter outside the courtroom, it said.

This settlement follows two other financial agreements by the airline in recent weeks. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

DGCA removes SpiceJet from surveillance

NEW DELHI, 15 OCT

Aviation regulator DGCA on Tuesday said it has removed SpiceJet from enhanced surveillance regime in the wake of the airline taking actions to rectify deficiencies as well as raising funds to meet obligations.

On 13 September, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) placed the budget carrier under the enhanced surveillance regime following financial constraints.

Last month, crisis-hit SpiceJet raised Rs 3,000 crore from institutional investors and since then, it has cleared various dues. —*PTI*

Tata Group to create 5L jobs in 5 yrs: N Chandrasekaran

NEW DELHI, 15 OCT

Tata Group will create 5 lakh manufacturing jobs in the next five years across sectors such as semiconductor, electric vehicles, battery and related industries, its Chairman N Chandrasekaran said on Tuesday.

Speaking at a symposium of Indian Foundation for Quality Management, the Tata Sons Chairman asserted that India cannot achieve the goals of being a developed nation, if the country cannot create manufacturing jobs.

" I think we will create five lakh manufacturing jobs in the next five years," he said.

Citing the group's upcoming semiconductor plant in Assam and other new manufacturing units for electric vehicles and battery, he said, "we are setting up a number of plants".

Chandrasekaran said based on "basic math", these jobs will have multiplier effects. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

PVR INOX Q2 loss at ₹12.1 cr; revenue falls

NEW DELHI, 15 OCT

Leading multiplex operator PVR INOX on Tuesday reported a consolidated net loss of Rs 12.1 crore for the second quarter ended September 2024, impacted by the decline in the movie exhibition business.

The company posted a net profit of Rs 166.2 crore a year ago, according to a regulatory filing by PVR Inox.

Its revenue from operations fell 18.9 per cent to Rs 1,622.1 crore during the quarter under review.

PVR INOX's total expenses in the September quarter dropped 6.84 per cent to Rs 1,678.6 crore.

Its revenue from the Movie exhibition business declined 19.86 per cent to Rs 1,578.6 crore during the quarter. —*PTI*

WTW SURVEY

'Corporates may offer 9.5% hike by 2025'

NEW DELHI, 15 OCT

Corporate India is expected to offer a salary hike of 9.5 per cent in 2025, similar to the 2024 actual salary increase, as companies are balancing optimism with caution, a report said on Tuesday.

According to WTW's latest Salary Budget Planning Report, the median salary increase in India is forecasted to rise by 9.5 per cent in 2025, similar to the 2024 actual salary increase of 9.5 per cent.

Salary increases in India continue to be the highest across the region. Markets such as Vietnam (7.6 per cent), Indonesia (6.5 per cent), the Philippines (5.6 per cent), China (5 per cent) and Thailand (5 per cent) are also projected to maintain a strong salary increase for next year.

The Salary Budget Planning Report is compiled by WTW's Rewards Data Intelligence practice. The survey was conducted in April and June 2024. Approximately 32,000 responses were received from companies across 168 countries worldwide. The survey had 709 participants from India.

In 2025, salary increases across industries such as the Pharmaceuticals (10 per cent), Manufacturing (9.9 per cent), Insurance (9.7 per cent), Captives and SSO sectors (9.7 per cent) and Retail (9.6 per cent) are likely to be above the general industry salary median, whereas software and Business Services at 9 per cent are projected below the general industry median of 9.5 per cent.

In terms of hiring, almost 28 per cent of companies plan to add headcount in the next 12 months, while 68 per cent companies plan to maintain their headcount in 2025 as compared to the previous year. —*PTI*

In terms of hiring, almost 28 per cent of companies plan to add headcount in the next 12 months **PHOTO: PTI**

Fundraise allowed VIL to start capex cycle: Birla

NEW DELHI, 15 OCT

The fundraise by Vodafone Idea enabled the telco to kick-start its capex cycle again, and that alongside other key initiatives will place it on a "more secure footing" to ensure that the company remains dynamic and competitive, Aditya Birla Group Chairman Kumar Mangalam Birla said on Tuesday.

Speaking at the inauguration of IMC and ITUWTSA 2024, Birla exuded confidence that with continued support of the government, Vodafone Idea Ltd (VIL) will do its part in realising India's digital destiny.

"With the continued support of the government, I am confident that we will do our part to realise the Prime Minister's digital India destiny. I am a firm believer in the transformative power of India's telecom sector and I see it as a bridge to better India," he said. VIL's fundraise has enabled the company to kick-start its capex cycle, he noted. Public awareness campaigns too educate users how to avoid spams." —*PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

PHOTO: X

Bangladesh coach Hathurusingha suspended

DHAKA, 15 OCT

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has suspended men's team head coach Chandika Hathurusingha due to inappropriate conduct by him during last year's ODI World Cup in India. Hathurusingha, the former Sri Lanka all-rounder under whom Bangladesh recently endured a forgettable tour of India where they were whitewashed in both the Test and T20I series, will be sacked and replaced by former West Indies player Phil Simmons. According to ESPNcricinfo, Simmons, who was also an all-rounder and opened the batting for the West Indies in the early and mid 1990s, will be in charge of the Bangladesh team until next year's ICC Champions Trophy. The BCB investigated an allegation from a player that the coach had slapped him during the World Cup last year. *—PTI*

Lakshya, Malvika make early exits at Denmark Open

ODENSE, 15 OCT

India's Lakshya Sen battled hard against China's Lu Guang Zu but ultimately lost in three games to make an early exit from the Denmark Open Super 750 badminton tournament here on Tuesday. Lakshya, a 2021 World championship bronze medallist, squandered an opening game advantage, losing 21-12 19-21 14-21 to Lu in a men's singles opening round match which lasted 70 minutes. The 22-year-old from Almora, who finished fourth at the Paris Olympics, had previously lost in the second round of the Arctic Open in Finland last week. Malvika Bansod, who had reached the quarterfinals at China Open, also couldn't cross the opening hurdle, going down to Vietnam's Nguyen Thuy Linh 13-21 12-21 in women's singles. *—PTI*

Beaumont wins ICC Women's Player of the Month

DUBAI, 15 OCT

England's batting veteran Tammy Beaumont was awarded the International Cricket Council (ICC) Women's Player of the Month award for September, announced the worldwide governing body of the sport on Monday. A statement from ICC said, "England's experienced opening batter Tammy Beaumont has taken home the ICC Women's Player of the Month for September 2024, beating out opposition from Ireland teenager Aimee Maguire and UAE all-rounder Esha Oza." Beaumont was in stunning form in the month of September as she dominated for England during their tour of Ireland in both white-ball formats. It helped Beaumont claim a second monthly award, with the 33-year-old right-hander having also won the monthly gong way back in February 2021. *—ANI*

Arsenal Women coach Jonas Eidevall quits

LONDON, 15 OCT

Arsenal Women manager Jonas Eidevall quit on Tuesday, less than a month into the new season. The English team has won just one of its first four matches in the Women's Super League and lost its opening game in the Champions League group stage, 5-2 at Bayern Munich. Eidevall joined in June 2021 from FC Rosengard in his native Sweden and led Arsenal to two League Cup titles as well as the Champions League semifinals in the 2022-23 season. It was the first time in 10 years Arsenal reached that stage in Europe's top club competition. His last game in charge was a 2-1 home loss to Chelsea in the Super League on Saturday. Arsenal said Eidevall resigned with immediate effect. *—PTI*

Rain may play spoilsport in India vs NZ 1st Test

Rohit and Virat eye consistent run against edgy Kiwis; Rohit relies on pace bowling bench

BENGALURU, 15 OCT

India and New Zealand are set to face off in the first Test at M Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru starting Wednesday. However, the match is likely to be affected by inclement weather, with persistent rain and thunderstorms expected over the next five days.

Yashasvi Jaiswal and Shubman Gill, the torchbearers of India's transition phase, will have to be the team's driving force in its quest to lord over an unsettled New Zealand when the two sides square off in a three-Test series, beginning here on Wednesday.

The baton has not been completely passed, but Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma are certainly running their last lap and these two young superstars will have to show that they can carry forward the legacy of the titans.

Since a productive series against England earlier this year, Gill is now more familiar and comfortable with the rigours of Test cricket.

It is reliably learnt that Gill has a stiff neck, but should be able to play here and the team physio is hard at work to ensure that he is fully fit for the game that also faces the threat of rain.

Gill's last 10 innings are dotted with three hundreds and two fifties, while Jaiswal's last eight outings in Test cricket feature a 214 and five fifties.

Those numbers are not to be scoffed at.

But at the same time, it is important for them to build on the foundation through this series, a precursor to the much tougher journey to Australia next month.

Gill seems to have sorted his issues with the in-coming deliveries from pacers, but a trace of the old failing still remains.

In Chennai, Bangladesh pacer Hasan Mahamud troubled him with nip-backers before eventually grabbing his wicket.

Similarly, Jaiswal has a penchant to go for expansive shots against pace bowlers to get dismissed, evidenced by his three dismissals recently against Bangladesh quicks.

In another blow, right-arm pacer Ben Sears has been ruled out of the series due to a knee injury. An uncapped Jacob Duffy, who has played six ODIs and 14 T20Is, has been brought into the squad.

Rohit said that the team is blessed with a strong pool of batters and he wants to build a similar stock in pace bowling so that injuries stop having a bearing on the side's balance. *—PTI*

An aerial view of M Chinnaswamy Stadium ahead of the first Test match between India and New Zealand, in Bengaluru, on Tuesday; Rohit Sharma (Inset) **PHOTOS: MOHAMMED ASAD/PTI**

HAVE TO KEEP BUMRAH QUIET: PAT CUMMINS

MUMBAI, 15 OCT

Australia will have to find a way to keep Indian pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah quiet if they are to win the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, reckoned captain Pat Cummins on Tuesday as they draw comfort from success in last two ICC finals against their fierce rivals.

The world's top two Test teams will clash in a five-match affair starting on November 22 in Perth and India will enter the contest having held the trophy for nearly a decade, which includes winning two consecutive series Down Under.

"I'm a big fan of Bumrah. I think he's a fantastic bowler. Hopefully, if we can keep him quiet, that is going to go a long way to winning the series," Cummins said on the Star Sports Press Room. *—PTI*

This team has shown no growth in 3 years: Mithali

NEW DELHI, 15 OCT

- Speaking to PTI from Dubai, Mithali said the team's downfall was a result of not getting used to the conditions in the UAE quick enough, lack of role clarity in the batting department, untested bench strength, and below-par fielding

Former India captain Mithali Raj on Tuesday attributed the national team's underwhelming performance in the Women's T20 World Cup to lack of growth across departments over the past three years.

It was the first time under Harmanpreet Kaur's long captaincy tenure that India failed to qualify for the knockouts of the ICC showpiece, extending the team's title-less run in world events and putting serious question marks over her future as skipper.

Speaking to PTI from Dubai, Mithali said the team's downfall was a result of not getting used to the conditions in the UAE quick enough, lack of role clarity in the batting department, untested bench strength, and below-par fielding.

If I talk about the Australia game, it was a match to win. I thought at some point we had a chance but it seemed like we are following the same template against Australia. Taking the match deep but falling short eventually. It's not working. I feel that in the last two, three years, I've not really seen any growth in this team, in the sense like, I mean, beating the best side is what you always prepare for but it seems like we are saturated in the sense we are beating other teams and we are pretty happy in that.

We expect the openers to do well, we always expect Shafali to go big. But things have changed over the years. If both the openers go well, then we always get stuck in middle overs. That has been our story. And then we try and make up in the end. The the power play and the death overs is where we do well, but in the middle overs, we've not found ways to get better.

Against Australia, I was very disappointed to see, other than Radha Yadav and Jemi to some extent, I don't think there was anybody. So we cannot have just two players out of eleven being good. In terms of fitness, we need to have a benchmark. Honestly, how much can you work in a month? It's something that you do around the year. It's not like just before the tournament, you have a camp and it's just going to really show the difference on the field. *—PTI*

ISSF WORLD CUP FINAL

Sonam Maskar wins Silver in Women's 10m Air Rifle

NEW DELHI, 15 OCT

Indian shooter Sonam Uttam Maskar clinched the silver medal in the Women's 10m Air Rifle event at the ISSF World Cup Final 2024 in Delhi on Tuesday. The 22-year-old Maskar impressed with a score of 252.9 to secure her podium finish. China's Yuting Huang claimed the gold medal, while French shooter Oceanne Muller took home the bronze. The other Indian finalist, Tilottama Sen, finished sixth with a score of 167.7.

The 10m Air Pistol Men and Women's finals are also lined up on day one. All the finals will be preceded by qualification rounds. The World Cup will see 131 of the world's top shooters from 37 nations including multiple reigning Olympic champions participate in the season ending competition which will determine the year's best shooter of the year, in each of the 12 individual Olympic events.

A squad of 23 Indian top guns will also be among them, taking on the world's shooting elite at home.

The world's top six athletes of the combined six ISSF World Cup stages held throughout 2024, along with Paris Olympic medallists, defending ISSF World Cup Final champions and reigning world champions have achieved direct qualification in each of the 12 events, for the New Delhi shooting extravaganza.

Three events, the men's 10m Air Pistol, the men's Trap and the women's 25m Pistol will in-fact see all three Paris medallists in the event compete for the top prize of 5000 euros. All defending champions in each of the 12 events from the previous year in Doha, will also be there to defend their titles. Earlier, the President of the International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF), Luciano Rossi, hailed India's increasing contribution to the development and growing popularity of sport shooting around the world.

Rossi was addressing members of the media during a press conference on Sunday, ahead of the ISSF World Cup Final Rifle/Pistol/Shotgun New Delhi 2024, competitions for which begin at the Dr. Karni Singh Shooting Range from 15 October. *—ANI*

22-year-old Sonam Uttam Maskar impressed with a score of 252.9 to secure her podium finish **PHOTO: X/ @INDIANSHOOTING**

IOA doesn't pay heed to our advice: Mary Kom

NEW DELHI, 15 OCT

Boxing great M C Mary Kom, who is also the chairperson of IOA's athletes' commission, says she has stopped giving suggestions to the National Olympic Committee as it doesn't pay attention to them.

Mary Kom was among 10 elite sportspersons who were elected on the IOA athletes' commission back in November 2022. The IOA is currently witnessing intense infighting with a section of the office-bearers questioning the governance of president P T Usha, who has denied all allegations against her.

"I am not into the IOA functioning. We shared so many things with IOA but they don't listen to it. I have a voice but they don't listen to what I suggest. I don't know politics and I don't want to blame anyone," Mary Kom told PTI when asked about the ongoing power struggle in the IOA.

The boxers returned without a medal from the Paris Olympics and Mary Kom was terribly disappointed at that outcome. The 41-year-old lamented that nobody in the Boxing Federation of India sought her help ahead of the Olympics. "I can't pinpoint what went wrong because they did not invite me at all. They could have used my experience. I can tell the boxers their weak and strong points," she said on the sidelines of Indian Gaming Convention. *—PTI*

RANJI TROPHY DAY 4: BARODA, TN FETCH DOMINANT WINS

NEW DELHI, 14 OCT

The day four of Ranji Trophy concluded on Monday with fine six wicket hauls from Bhargav Bhatt and Gurjapneet Singh which guided Baroda and Tamil Nadu to some fine victories. At the start of action in Elite Group A, Mumbai was chasing 262 runs and started action at 42/2. Bhargav's spin web bamboozled the famed Mumbai stars and his six-wicket haul left Mumbai 84 runs short of the target. His figures of 4-53 and 6-55 earned him the Player of the Match award. In Srinagar, Maharashtra was skittled out for 428 runs in reply to Jammu and Kashmir's 519/7. Auqib Nabi picked up a five-for for Jammu. *—PTI*

UDITA ATTRACTS HIGHEST BID IN FIRST HALF OF HIL WOMEN'S AUCTION

NEW DELHI, 15 OCT

Indian defender Udita Duhan emerged as the costliest buy in the first half of the Hockey India League women's auction after she was acquired by Shrachi Rarh Bengal Tigers for Rs 32 lakh here on Tuesday.

Dutch star drag-flicker Yibbi Janssen was the second most expensive player and was bought by Odisha Warriors for Rs 29 lakh. Indian players Lalremsiami (for Rs 25 lakh to Shrachi Rarh Bengal Tigers), Sunelita Toppo (for Rs 24 lakh to Delhi SG Pipers), and Sangita Kumari (for Rs 22 lakh to Delhi SG Pipers) attracted significant attention in the first half of the auction.

Several overseas players, including Belgium's Charlotte Englebert (for Rs 16 lakh to Soorma Hockey Club), Germany's Charlotte Stapenhorst (for Rs 16 lakh to Soorma Hockey Club), and Australia's Jocelyn Bartram (for Rs 15 lakh to Odisha Warriors) were the notable buys.

Veteran India striker Vandana Katariya fetched Rs 10.5 lakh from Shrachi Rarh Bengal Tigers.

Former India captain Savita (Rs 20 lakh), Sharmila Devi (Rs 10 lakh) and Nikki Pradhan (Rs 12 lakh) are some of the big Indian names bought by Soorma Hockey Club.

Delhi SG Pipers also picked up India internationals Navneet Kaur (Rs 19 lakh), young goalkeeper Bichu Devi Kharibam (Rs 16 lakh) and Deepika (Rs 20 lakh).

Belgium midfielder Victor Wegnez was the most expensive player on the second day of the Hockey India League players' auction with Soorma Hockey Club shelling out Rs 40 lakh for his services. *—PTI*

Udita Duhan **PHOTO: X**

COST CUTTING

Ferguson to leave ManU ambassador role

MANCHESTER, 15 OCT

Manchester United great Alex Ferguson will step down from his role as club ambassador at the end of the season, a person with knowledge of the decision told The Associated Press on Tuesday.

The person spoke on the condition of anonymity because the move has not been publicly announced.

Ferguson will be 83 in December and the person said the ending of his ambassadorship was "amicable" and he would "always be welcome at Old Trafford."

Ferguson won 13 Premier League titles with United and is widely regarded as one of the finest managers in the history of soccer. He is United's most successful manager, having won 28 major trophies.

Ferguson won 13 Premier League titles with United and is widely regarded as one of the finest managers **PHOTO: X/@FABRIZIOROMANO**

He has been a club ambassador since retiring after leading United to its last league title in 2013.

His imminent departure comes at a time when the club is undergoing major change following the partial buyout by British billionaire Jim Ratcliffe in February.

United has undergone an extensive restructuring program following Ratcliffe's investment of $1.3 billion for a 27.7 per cent stake and implemented cost-saving initiatives that it said included staff redundancies of around 250 roles.

United reported losses of 113.2 million pounds ($148 million) in its latest accounts. Ferguson was hired by United in 1986 at a time when the club had long-since lost its place as the pre-eminent force in English soccer.

He ended its 26-year wait for the league title in 1993 and went on to dominate the Premier League era right up until his retirement when United was crowned champion with an 11-point lead over Abu Dhabi-backed Manchester City. He has been a regular spectator at United games since his retirement, watching the team home and away during a time when the club has been in obvious decline on the field. *—PTI*

Italy outclass Israel 4-1 in Nations League

UDINE, 15 OCT

There were snipers on the roof of the stadium and a heavy police presence throughout the city of Udine for Italy's home match against Israel.

In the end, both the game — and an earlier pro-Palestine demonstration — passed without incident as Italy beat Israel 4-1 in the Nations League. Udine was on high alert, with the game being played against the backdrop of the ongoing conflict in the Middle East which has spread to Lebanon after more than a year-long war in Gaza.

It was the first match Israel has played outside neutral Hungary this year. After the Israel-Hamas war started on 7 October last year, the national soccer team played in Kosovo and Andorra last November.

All Israel matches since then have been in Hungary, including last month's game against Belgium in the Nations League after the Belgian Football Association refused to host the game for security reasons.

When Spalletti's team played its "away" match against Israel last month in Hungary, a group of about 50 Italy fans clad in all black turned their backs in apparent protest during Israel's national anthem.

There were boos from some fans in Udine when the Israeli anthem was played on Monday but the rest of the stadium tried to drown that out with loud applause — just as they had done when the Israel team was read out.

Around 1,000 people took part in a pro-Palestine demonstration earlier in the city center. Among the placards, there were several posters calling on soccer's governing bodies to ban Israel. *—PTI*